

Futurist Folklore and Materialist Magic: New Wave Science Fiction in American Counterculture

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Abstract

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My work provides a broad framework for reformulating subject-object relations, which requires a critical transfer of different literary and scientific ideas into other social and historical contexts. The project tracks transformations of consciousness using cultural studies and genre criticism put in relation to popular writing and other embodied practices of meaning-making. The dissertation, through its crosslinking of literary and cultural “texts” culled from drastically different registers, provides an extended genealogy of New Wave science fiction (SF) and its legacy, with particular emphasis put on their shared interest in altered states—from the project of speculative aesthetics to the power of affective encounters found in not only fiction but in the strange performances and experimental practices of the sixties counterculture(s)—that I argue extend into the late twentieth century. What might this particular cross-section of cultural narratives and counter histories offer us for rethinking processes of historical change through the more flexible and capacious category of *feeling*? What sort of alternative forms of world-making might help us find new paths through and to pleasure, poetry, and politics? Can we learn to adapt to experiences of disorientation long

enough to change directions? The archive's means and methods of *losing control* and *getting lost* make inroads into unknown and unknowable spaces and end up in unexpected and unexplainable places. These open strategies and technical tactics for moral and ideological realignment animate my line of inquiry, so that "Futurist Folklore and Materialist Magic" can conduct in-depth studies in a survey of literary and cultural formations from the post-1945 American context, stressing the post-1965 period. Charting New Wave SF while also moving across idiosyncratic yet imbricated countercultures—drugs, cults, and cut-ups—the dissertation analyzes the material, psychological, social, political, and sign systems that differentially legitimate and delegitimize popular practices so as to clarify the co-evolution of what are a set of decidedly American values as they appear in the national, cultural imaginary. Drawing from affect theory, embodied cognition, and relational subjectivity to study such desired objects requires taking an ethnographic stance toward popular literacies and fan practices, which enables the dissertation to contribute to the growing body of interdisciplinary work on the American counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s as a way to both take seriously and recuperate value for what might otherwise be thought of as misreading(s) that *move* people, nevertheless. Using a transposable and adaptable apparatus of theoretical lenses in combination with historical specificity and devotion to specific materials that are more often left in the margins and interstices allows me to add to critical scholarship from a position of nuanced expertise—each of the three chapter's focal point is a specific moment in literary history and its connection(s) to another particularized iteration of the mid-to-late twentieth-century's American counterculture. The first chapter focuses on J.G. Ballard's psychonaut manifesto and introduces key historical antecedents to the New Wave to anchor the countercultures examined, broadly—William S. Burroughs (cut-ups), John C. Lilly (drugs), and L. Ron Hubbard (cults). I move into a narrower literary analysis the second and third chapters on Philip K. Dick and Octavia E. Butler.

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Chapter One

Contextualizing New Wave SF as Sixties Counterculture

preface

Popular culture, and science fiction is the folk literature of the twentieth century, with the folk tale's hot line to the unconscious (Ballard, 1993: 94).

I feel that a new mythology is now possible in the space age...and in closing I would say that the future of writing is in space and not in time (Burroughs, 1962: 340).

My dissertation, “Futurist Folklore and Materialist Magic: (A)gnostic Pedagogies of (Para)praxis [New Wave Science Fiction in American Counterculture],” explores how and to what ends New Wave science fiction (SF) and its heirs attend to altered states of human consciousness. Specifically, it intervenes and develops what has become a kind of popular common wisdom about New Wave SF as involved with 1960s and 1970s countercultural practices. Going back to the New Wave author and critic J.G. Ballard's founding manifesto of the literary movement, “Which Way to Inner Space?” (1962), the New Wave has been associated not only with SF but also with other counterculture(s) of the historical period interested in altered states. The argument is intervening in this common rhetoric or discourse in order to define how this literature actually explores altered states of perception. Altered states is a catch-all term used describe non-ordinary or exceptional states of consciousness (usually induced) that are qualitatively distinct from baseline states, such as mystical visions, near-death experiences, lucid dreaming, dissociative states, religious rituals, ceremonial practices, drug hallucinations, and/or psychotic breaks. Ballard's influential essay marked the genre's inward turn as “more and more concerned with the creation of new states of mind”; however, this inward turn is also a move out onto other popular formations, since these new states of mind were simultaneously being defined and explored in other, non-literary ways

(197). I argue that New Wave SF is concerned with types of knowledge that cannot be rendered directly, alluding to aesthetic experience and other altered states as *excess* or *overflow*. In keeping with these ideas, I offer an extended genealogy of the literary movement, drawing on both New Wave and post-New Wave SF more typically conceived, and pair my literary analysis with cultural studies in three chapters that look at cut-ups, drugs, and cults as methods of inducing unusual perceptual states with a sort of popular pedagogy to them. Indeed, I argue New Wave SF cannot be understood as part of a larger formation without accounting for a subset of interrelated cultural phenomena—fringe science, alternative spirituality, and popular psychology—as these widespread subcultures also connect their altered states of consciousness to new at times strange views on cosmology. So, the project looks to countercultural practices as slippery forms of self-insight and second sight, which slide from sublime to subliminal and back again, with particular interest in the affective transformations that accompany such activities. In *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), cultural theorist Katherine Hayles similarly stresses the critical need to think across “different kinds of cultural productions” (24). Spanning New Wave SF and the history of cybernetics, she illustrates how “the feedback loops that run between technologies and perceptions, artifacts and ideas, have...implications for how historical change occurs” (14). More broadly, cyberneticists theorize systems as fundamentally relational entities which is tested through the building of models and mechanisms (physical, conceptual, and/or fictional). As Hayles argues, “literary texts often reveal, as scientific work cannot, the complex cultural, social, and representational issues tied up with conceptual shifts and technological innovations” (24). In this re-reading of the historical relation between literature, science, technology, and culture, “literary texts are not...passive conduits” because they “actively shape” the meaning that technology and science carries “in cultural contexts”; literature is the “heart that keeps this circulatory system flowing,” and its

“passageways” are what have “enabled stories coming out of narrowly focused scientific theories” to gain traction in the “body politic” (21). My analysis of the New Wave in connection to cut-ups, drugs, and cults documents an attempt to “recover a sense,” one which “fully recognizes the importance of the embodied processes constituting the lifeworld of human beings,” and which endeavors to “show the erasures” as well as “the visions” created by alternative practices and new technologies of practical consciousness alteration (20). In *Discognition* (2015), literary critic Steven Shaviro bridges the gap between literary SF and cognitive philosophy in order to ascertain “the status of phenomenal experience” and “the role of speculative aesthetics” (33, 44). Shaviro discusses how “science fiction can allude to...states and conditions that exceed any possibility of direct depiction or explicit conceptualization” (38). This idea of nonconceptual experience, or “noncognitive experience,” acknowledges the fact that “before it is cognitive, let alone conscious, thought is primordially an affective and aesthetic phenomenon...what Alfred North Whitehead calls ‘feeling’” (16). Speculative aesthetics involves communicating nonconceptual experience, which links its project to fringe science, alt spirituality, and pop psychology as working examples of such nonconceptual experience. Most critically, then, Shaviro’s theory of SF positions aesthetic and affective experiences as cognition’s “*other*” within the much wider range of noncognitive, embodied processes (38, emphasis in original). Since “actual phenomenal experience” is what “makes up the intimate texture of our every conscious moment,” Shaviro argues, “we tend to forget how *strange* it is” (29, emphasis in original). With this in mind, my selection of New Wave SF deviates from traditional SF to include a “dimension of experience” external to the “process of cognition,” which is only available “noncognitively—which is to say aesthetically” (37). And, as “mental functioning and subjective experience need not themselves be cognitive” (and are usually not), my invocation of drugs and cults is meant to “designate something that disrupts cognition,

exceeds the limits of cognition, but also subtends cognition” (11). Building on these models, my project contributes to a growing body of interdisciplinary work that attempts to move outside of cognitivist and objectivist assumptions and to enter into the otherworldly dimensions of aesthetic and affective encounters. The dissertation thus examines how threshold experiences—either above or below that which is properly cognitive—engender new ways of *feeling* familiar with forms of estrangement that cannot be *known*.

In the 1960s, the New Wave emerged as a literary movement that broke from the earlier SF tropes and traditions. In the 1962 edition of *New Worlds*, Ballard’s “Which Way to Inner Space?” called on the genre to reinvent itself more in the style of “the serious fringe material,” so it might become a “speculative poetry and fantasy of science” (195). The so-called ‘Modernist moment’ of SF, New Wave writers tried to show “interrelationships of time and space indirectly,” and had an “experimental enthusiasm,” which was more “abstract” and “cool” (197, 198). The New Wave SF dramatizes conscious and unconscious processes in an aesthetically provocative yet still popular form, one which “illustrate[s] themes obliquely” with the use of more “psycho-literary ideas” (198). Ballard took this further, suggesting that New Wave SF authors were the “iconographers of inner space,” whose composition processes “resemble[d] the mechanism[s] by which dreams are constructed” (“Time, Memory, and Inner Space” 200). Importantly, this notion of “inner space” was taken up more broadly and Ballard’s proclamation heralded and christened the wider psychonaut movement of the 1960s and 1970s (“Which Way to Inner Space?” 198).¹ Though

¹ The psychonaut movement refers to a wide range of cultural activities and practices that seek to explore the psychic areas of inner space. “Psychonaut” is a portmanteau meaning “sailor of the soul” (“psyche” is the Greek word for “soul” and “naut” means “sailor”), which has the added modern valences of ‘psycho’ and ‘psychology’ (*Oxford Language Dictionary*). Ernst Jünger, for example, used the term in *Approaches: Drugs and Ecstatic Intoxication* (1970), an essay on his drug experiments that employs metaphors of “coastal cliffs,” “coral reefs,” “shipwreck,” and “skulls and crossbones” as a sea-faring analogy for exploring the realm of inner space (8). In 1952, Burroughs notes, “Alex Trocchi coined the phrase ‘astronauts of inner space,’” which gives some historicity to the term as predating the 1960s and 1970s psychonautic countercultures (*Naked Scientology* 88). The term “beatnik” referred to the slightly earlier 1950s and 1960s youth subculture and literary movement, also known as “the beat generation,” that William

clearly hostile toward the genre's inward turn and the counterculture, SF critic Kinsley Amis articulates the historical relations that structure the ethnographic and the aesthetic field. In his account, New Wave SF arose from the "'sixties scene, along with pop music, hippie clothes and hairdos, pornography, reefers,'" which led to a variety of "'shock tactics, tricks with typography, one-line chapters, strained metaphors, obscurities, obscenities, drugs, oriental religions, and left-wing politics'" (Amis qtd. in "New Means Worse" 190). Sociologist and scientist Andy Pickering observes a similar overlap in his book, *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* (2010):

In different ways, *the sixties and cybernetics* shared an interest in the performative brain, with *technologies of the decentered self* as a point of exchange....Just as I conceive of cybernetics as *ontology in action*, playing out...a performative understanding of the brain, *one can equally see the sixties as a form of ontological theater staging the same concerns...in unconventional forms of daily life* (82, emphasis mine).

Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac were founding members of, in which "beat" is "worn out" or "downtrodden," and also as in the musical "beat" or rhythm (as in beat poetry and music). "Beatnik" also has a similar etymological structure that picks up on the sound "pattern of *sputnik* [and is] perhaps influenced by US use of Yiddish -nik, denoting someone or something who acts in a particular way" (*Oxford Language Dictionary*). The renowned philosopher Walter Benjamin's forays into something of a similar kind is documented in "The Drug Experiments," which were conducted between 1927 and 1934, and included participants such as fellow philosopher Ernst Bloch; Benjamin's early drug journals were written in the form of what he called "drug 'protocols' [in which he discussed] *rauschen*, 'to rustle; rush; roar; thunder; murmur,'" a word taken up in "the argot of 1960s drug culture" ("Translator's Forward," *On Hashish* viii, xii). Bloch's "ambiguous wink of nirvana" and Benjamin's "profane illumination" derive from quasi-religious drug experiences (30). The German '*rausch*' or 'rush' roughly translates as either "intoxication" or "trance," although according to Boon, the former "is too clinical" and the latter "too mystical" (xii). Kerouac came up with the title for Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959), which referred to "the rush of pure sensation" (qtd. in "Hitman for the Apocalypse" 132). Benjamin's essay "Surrealism" (1929) borrows "dialectics of intoxication" from these drug experiments, and "goes on to ask about the conditions under which such liberated experience can be the basis for political liberation" (*On Hashish* xi). Burroughs records a similar slant, "Allen Ginsberg: The Beat movement was more a socio-political movement than a literary one" (qtd. in *Last Words* 217). In 1953, Burroughs wrote: "The yage feel of Space—time travel across sands, the cold wind of..." (qtd. in *Everything Lost* 132). A few days later, perhaps alluding to *Vents* (1946; *Winds*), a poem by French symbolist Saint-John Perse, he writes: "St-Perse. This is Yage./ poetry. / Just as there is weed / music and painting and poetry. / I wonder if he ever used it." (186). Eight years prior, Perse had written in *Vents*: "*Yaghé, liane du pauvre, qui fait surgir l'envers des choses—ou la plante Pi-lu*" (qtd. in *Galand* 9). Oliver Harris pulls a partial quote, "*Yaghé, liane du pauvre, qui fait surgir l'envers des choses*," which translates as: "*Yaghe, liana of the poor, that evokes the reverse of things*" (*Everything Lost* xiii). The excluded final clause uses a Chinese phrase (披露. pī lù. to reveal): "*—ou la plante Pi-lu*," meaning, "*—or the plant of Revelation*." Other psychonautic practices include (but are not limited to) the gnostic use of: drugs, hallucinogens, psychedelics, trance, fasting, chanting, dancing, drumming, hypnosis, meditation, religious rituals, shamanistic practices, Eastern mysticism, magical practices, pow-wows, vision quests, silent retreats, talking circles, breathwork, music festivals, tai chi, tantric sex, astral projection, lucid dreaming, automatic writing, glossolalia, sweat lodges, seances, Ouija boards, yoga, out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation, or oxygen deprivation.

“Cybernetics” in the modern context was first defined by computer scientist Norbert Wiener in his 1948 book of that title as “the study of control and communication in the animal and the machine” (248). The word “cybernetics” derives from the Greek κυβερνήτης (*kybernētēs*, steersman, governor, pilot, or rudder), which has throughlines with “psychonaut,” both in its etymological and philosophical meaning(s) (*Oxford Language Dictionary*). So, the cybernetic (and psychonautic) connection to SF, especially to the New Wave and cyberpunk, but equally to the earlier cultural figures whom I’ll position as its precursors, is located in its more abstract study of what is called “general systems theory,” which erased the theoretical boundary between its study of “the animal and the machine,” and focused its full attention on forms of “control and communication” (Wiener 248).² In this opening chapter, I outline a less familiar line of narrative of literary influence by recontextualizing Brian McHale’s “prosthetic augmentation” of cyberpunk in the work of New Wave author, William S. Burroughs (256).³ This requires rethinking “cut-ups” more broadly as a

² In *Chaos & Cyberculture* (1994), Timothy Leary speaks to this etymological point with a slightly different emphasis, which nevertheless was the epitome of the connection between 60s counterculture and cyberpunk. Leary points out:

The term “cybernetics” comes from the Greek word *kubernetes*, “pilot.” The Greek word *kubernetes*, when translated to Latin, comes out as *gubernetes*. This basic verb *gubernare* means to control the actions or behavior, to direct, to exercise sovereign authority, to regulate, to keep under, to restrain, to steer. This Roman concept is obviously very different from the Hellenic notion of “pilot.” The word “cybernetics” was coined in 1948 by Norbert Wiener, who wrote “We have decided to call the entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or in the animal, by the name of Cybernetics, which we form from the Greek for steersman.” The word “cyber” has been redefined (in the *American Heritage Dictionary*) as “the theoretical study of control processes in electronic, mechanical, and biological systems, especially the flow of information in such systems.” The derivative word “cybernetate” means “to control automatically by computer or to be so controlled.” [...] Note how Wiener and the Romanesque engineers have corrupted the meaning of “cyber.” The Greek word “pilot” becomes “governor” or “director”; the term “to steer” becomes “to control.” [...] The etymological distinctions between Greek and Roman terms are quite relevant to the pragmatics of the culture surrounding their usage. [...] The terms “cybernetic person” or “cybernaut” return us to the original meaning of “pilot” and puts the self-reliant person back in the loop (64, 65, 67).

Leary’s term here, “cybernaut,” thus parallels the earlier term, “psychonaut,” in important ways. As Terence McKenna reminds us in *Mondo 2000: A User’s Guide to the New Edge* (1992), “psychedelic” means “mind-manifesting” (206). The title of this New Age anthology of cyberpunk writing is alluded to in Ballard’s collection of essays and reviews, ranging from 1962 to 1995, on New Wave SF and Burroughs in particular, *A User’s Guide to the Millennium* (1996).³ The outer limit of genre, Burroughs is certainly New Wave, but arguably on the fringes of SF; however, his literary and cultural influence cannot be overstated. Additionally, the New Wave editor, author, and critic, Judith Merrill, did include his short story, “They Do Not Always Remember” (1966), in her best of anthology *SF 12* (1968). Barrington Bayley’s short story, “The Four-Color Problem” (1971), republished in *New Worlds: An Anthology* (2004) by another

technology of consciousness and New Wave precursor to the cyberpunk motif of “self-hacking,” which readjusts one’s own ideological mainframe through tinkering with language and its unconscious processes. Certainly, this is how Burroughs conceived of his experimental writing practices. Burroughs speaks of his prosthetic device in the epilogue to *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), which I argue is a New Wave forerunner to cyberpunk’s more familiar sort of literalized prosthetic augmentation, saying, “a tape recorder is an externalized section of the human nervous system...listen to your present time tapes...to see who you are and what you are doing here (“The Invisible Generation” 338). This rewinds from cyberpunk SF of the 1980s and moves back into New Wave SF of the 1960s and 1970s, recentering its preoccupation with psychological space, which is another type of physicality; still, cyberpunk SF and New Wave SF have a shared interest in “synthetic psychologies” (“Which Way to Inner Space?” 198). As Salvador Dali said of the New Wave and psychonaut movement, the techniques foregrounded cut straight “to the unconscious” through the New Wave’s versions of brain-hacking (198). I argue there is more “magical potency” in the possibilities offered by the sixties counterculture because of how it attempts to imagine a world where one can precisely reconfigure the point “[at] which internal and external reality meet and fuse” by either (mis)using or (ab)using technological, broadly construed, augmentations (“Time, Memory, and Inner Space” 200).

Using this historical backdrop, I argue for an extended afterlife of the literary movement, drawing on both the New Wave and post-New Wave SF of Philip K. Dick and Octavia E. Butler, to study the genre in complex relation to extra-textual practices: drugs and cults. To contextualize

New Wave author, critic, and editor, Michael Moorcock, is a Burroughs homage and pastiche which mentions him by name, poaches parts of his stylistic eccentricities, and lifts some of his specific word choices and poetic phrasings. The story also specifically mentions Scientology by name and deploys several allusive scenes using Hubbard’s terms. Of course, Ballard’s New Wave SF, particularly *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1969), a collection of previously published short stories that makes use of the cut-up technique, as well as his nonfiction essays and reviews that theorize New Wave SF as a literary and cultural movement, are both hugely indebted and explicitly influenced by Burroughs’s work.

these real-world practices as cultural formations, I turn to three larger-than-life historical characters of the American countercultural canon: John C. Lilly, L. Ron Hubbard, and William S. Burroughs. Relatedly, in Hari Kunzru's introduction (2014) to J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1969), "science fiction's so-called 'new wave'" is described as displaying a "more anxious and subversive style of imagination," which established "the genre as a speculative avant-garde" (xi). Kunzru sees the cut-up novel as "a cousin of *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Manchurian Candidate*" and typifies the New Wave as showing "a deep anxiety about behaviorism, conditioning, and free will" (xvii). In the novel, Ballard extended Burroughs's cut-up technique by making "photocopied collages" and using "found text, such as surgical instructions and scientific papers" (xvii). Ballard's author-surrogate is "both a researcher and an experimental subject or patient," who is conducting "some kind of spun out scientific experiment" (xiv). This is a fitting introduction for the real-life historical personages who introduce and frame the three chapters of my dissertation. Creating a primer that couches my project in the post-1945 period, the American nation, and the oppositional culture, these iconoclasts provide an important prehistory for the New Wave productions and New Age practices studied in my archive. Already active on the scene in the 1950s, I argue that these notable eccentrics set the stage for the next act, prefiguring a counterculture that wouldn't fully develop until the 1960s and 1970s. Charting a history of ideas, I position Lilly, Hubbard, and Burroughs as key historical antecedents to the New Wave, because although they precede it, they are also its most paradigmatic practitioners. Taken separately, each celebrity anchors drugs (Lilly, Burroughs) and/or cults (Hubbard, Burroughs), and to a lesser-extent cut-ups (Burroughs), but taken together, they foreground a countercultural cross-linking of the New Wave and psychonaut movement. Notably, these 'cult figures' were involved with psychoanalysis, cybernetics, and behaviorism, and preoccupied with programming and control; nonetheless, they each reworked the paranoid pull of

the Cold War era and at least initially attempted to *move* the zeitgeist toward something like a reparative revival. Each personage epitomizes an avant-garde imperative of bringing ‘art-into-life’ while combatting its elitism by continually addressing the codes, concerns, and conventions of the popular masses. I suggest that they might qualify as postmodernist practitioners of a sort of *experimental performance art*, one which intermingled viral strains of wacky science, wayward religion, and weird writing. Literary critic Timothy Melley describes “brainwashing,” a term that emerged in the 1950s, as the “quintessential fantasy” of the Cold War’s “battle for the mind” (qtd. in “‘On modified human agents’: John Lilly and the paranoid style of American neuroscience” 21). Other contemporary historical scholars have observed that from cultural fears of “brainwashing” and “mind control” sprung countercultural fantasies of “mind-expansion” and social revolution (88). Lilly, Hubbard, and Burroughs were intensely interested in determining whether and to what extent ‘programming’ was in-built or fixed into the ‘hardware’ (or ‘wetware’) of the brain, and whether the ‘software’ of the self might be pliable enough to rewrite or overwrite social, cultural, and perceptual codes for the purposes of reprogramming.⁴ Both New Wave SF and psychonaut counterculture return to the body and revive the unconscious in ways that are distinct from either Surrealism or psychoanalysis, though still informed by them. I argue this is one of the complexities that this formation attempts to theorize in its relentless investigations into the implications of “automatism,” which was “liberating, yes, but also sinister” (Kunzru xvii). For human subjects navigating the new social world of postmodernity, these disruptive overhauls and subversive techniques are freighted with dueling potentialities, which I suggest is one of the reasons that the New Wave’s utopian/dystopian double edge can be hard to make sense of.

⁴ In 1992, Leary called Lilly’s work, specifically *Programming and Metaprogramming in the Human Biocomputer* (1968), the “*Principia Psychologica* of the Cybernetic Age,” saying, “start thinking of your brain as a biocomputer. Wet Ware. Start thinking of your minds (plural) as your software” (qtd. in “‘On modified human agents’” 96, emphasis in original). SF author Rudy Rucker’s biopunk novel *Wetware* (1988) (from the *Ware Tetralogy*) preceded this usage.

By attaching the literary works of New Wave SF authors to my three antecedent figures, the three chapters account for New Wave SF as a literary formation in complex relation to other countercultural formations of the period. Chapter One focuses on William S. Burroughs's cut-up literature in framing New Wave SF as an intervention into and by language and his nonfiction in a gloss of the counterculture as an intervention into and of ideology. Chapter Two uses two literary texts by Philip K. Dick with John C. Lilly's drug literature and nonfiction, which is supplemented by Burroughs's; Chapter Three uses three literary texts by Octavia E. Butler with L. Ron Hubbard's cult literature and nonfiction, which is again edged with some of Burroughs's. Using these three New Age prophets, who were well on their way in the early 1950s and who remained active into the late 20th Century, in conjunction with Dick's 1960s/70s and Butler's 1980s/90s literary SF, allows me to gloss a longer historical arc of these interpenetrating formations and trace a trajectory of their continuations and extensions of the characteristic concerns of the post-1945 period, with a focus on post-1965, in the evolving and uniquely American context, ideology, and culture. In this way, my dissertation attends to certain implicit and explicit relation between literature and culture or representation and reality in order to make room for a more radically utopian interface to be conceived and cultivated therein. To use the literary critic Rita Felski's terminology, it looks for "the place where art hooks up to life" (2). I also adopt affect theorist Eve Sedgwick's critical model of "paranoid and reparative reading," because as optics on the world, each "knows some things well and others poorly" ("Paranoid and Reparative Reading" 130). Interrogating pleasure always already prefigured as seduction or escape and incorporating the long history of 'control fantasies' that reproduce self-change as self-ownership, my project slides along, cuts across, and slices into a set of relays and ruptures between dominant systems of thought and emergent "structure[s] of feeling" in American counterculture from the mid-to-late twentieth century (*Preface to Film* 22).

As the cultural theorist Stuart Hall argues, postmodernism “breaks the one, true meaning into fragments and puts one into the universe of the infinite plurality of codes,” but it does not “destroy the process of encoding” (“On postmodernism and articulation” 137). Since the “cultural codes have become pluralized,” we are “in the middle of this multiplicity of readings and discourses,” but this “expansion” does not mean that “representation itself has collapsed”; instead, we have “all become, historically, fantastically codable encoding agents” (137). Still, for most people, as Hayles notes in her work on Burroughs and Dick’s SF, “this destabilization is bound to be threatening, rather than simply liberating” (215). As the literary theorist Brian McHale argues of “prosthetic augmentation” in cyberpunk SF, the promise of “exhilarating expansion of the self” also entails the problem (or risk) of “an identity-threatening dilution of attenuation” (256). Significantly, I extend the idea of “prosthetic augmentation” to the real use of neurochemical (drugs), sociocultural (cults), and psychophysiological (cut-ups) methods of perceptual alteration, as seen in the historical personages of John C. Lilly, L. Ron Hubbard, and William S. Burroughs. Lilly further intensified his use of drugs by coupling it with his own technological invention: “the float tank” (as well as his theories of “programming” and “metaprogramming”); Hubbard did the same with cults in the use of his own technological invention: “the e-meter” (as well as his theories of “auditing” and “the tone scale”); and Burroughs similarly extended cut-ups with his experimental use of the widely available technological device: “the tape-recorder” (as well as with his own technological contraptions of “the dreamachine” and “speech scramblers”). So, Philip K. Dick’s “The Electric Ant” (1969) and *A Scanner Darkly* (1977) represent allegorical and fictionalized drug use in “self-hacking” and “Substance D,” correspondingly. Octavia E. Butler’s unpublished *Blindsight* (1980-1987) and *Parable of the Sower* (1993)/*Parable of the Talents* (1998) represent fictionalized cult practices in cult leaders who have the ‘delusions’ (or ‘powers’) of “psychometry”

and “*hyperempathy*,” respectively. In all of these narratives—real and fictional—new technologies of consciousness (ranging from drugs to cults, computers to cut-ups, programming to poetry) are theorized as the materialist means (which are not without their ‘magic’) of altering neurofunction and/or augmenting perception through embodied practices that are designed to achieve what are otherwise ‘altered states’ of human consciousness.⁵

In my selection of literary and cultural ‘texts,’ new ‘technologies of consciousness’—including but of course not limited to the real-life practices of Lilly with drugs (and the float tank), Hubbard with cults (and the e-meter), and Burroughs with cut-ups (and the tape-recorder)—are characterized by a fundamental and inescapable ambivalence, appearing as “potentially liberating, but also not without danger” (Hayles 215). For this reason, these New Wave forerunners and the counterculture more generally were interested in retooling what social theorist Pierre Bourdieu called the “*habitus*,” defined as the “durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisation” (qtd. in Hayles 202). The “*habitus*,” as Hayles explains, is “learned, perpetuated, and changed through embodied practices” in continuous “interaction with the environment” (202). Or, said differently, we might understand the “*habitus*, as ‘systems of durably, transposable, dispositions,’ which integrate past experiences through the very ‘matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions’” (Bourdieu qtd. in Ahmed 552, emphasis in original). The project thus emphasizes “rituals” and other “bodily practices” that have a “performative aspect,” which “like performative language, must be enacted to take place” (Hayles 199). The routines, rituals, and procedures developed by Lilly, Hubbard, and Burroughs can be seen as applying psychologist William James’s “philosophy of habit,” which he says is neither “physiology [n]or psychology,”

⁵ As Kathy Acker writes in *The Burning Bombing of America: Destruction of the U.S.* (1972), an unpublished novel that explicitly uses the cut-up method, “we plan the state’s destruction in whatever way possible the first method we us NOW STATED random choice.flip through the universe without your senses do not control desire. follow desire wherever it lead you *take what magic*” (9, emphasis mine).

but a “physics [or behavior]” (*Habit* 6). In *Habit* (1890), James defines habit (or the habitus) as that which requires thought, feeling, and action to achieve its “plasticity” or “modifiability” (21). The “overcoming of resistance” is described as a “phenomenon of habituation,” the central feature of which is the reproduction of an effect (6). To realize a different effect, or to modify one, changes to what has become habitual should be introduced in whatever form necessary (practical, theoretical, or fictional). Importantly, James believes that the human psyche or nervous system is “specially distinguished by its reparative power,” which in my archive, represents the crucial element needed for “the recovery of [a] sensibility...which has for a time been rendered insensible” (19). Tempering method with a touch a madness, the dissertation works “*to put cognition in its place*” by re-integrating it with forms of embodiment that can “help us get along with the unknown and unknowable” (*Cybernetic Brain* 10, emphasis in original). In *Empire of the Senseless* (1988), Kathy Acker’s author-surrogate says, “I want to be mad, not senseless,” which means to be without reason, but not without sensation (51).⁶ This resonates with a remark made by New Age figure and literary beatnik Alan Watts, who says, “In order to come to your senses, you sometimes need to go out of your mind” (“Out of Your Mind” 172). In *Naked Lunch* (1959), Burroughs writes: “Where do they go when they walk out and leave the body behind?” (5). Acker’s cut-up writing shifts the discursive apparatus to center on my archive and its chosen objects: “(A hypothesis of the political uses of culture.) It was called MAINLINE. The perception based on culture is a drug, a necessity for sociopolitical control” (*Empire of the Senseless* 264). Or, to quote Burroughs again, with his line that reads: “Into the Interior: a vast subdivision, antennae of television to the meaningless sky” (*Naked Lunch* 5).

⁶ This in-text citation speaks to the title of Acker’s post-New Wave cut-up novel, *Empire of the Senseless*, which presumably also means the inverse of what I’ve explicated here. As the stand-in character for Burroughs says in David Cronenberg’s filmic adaptation of *Naked Lunch* (1991), “exterminate all rational thought.” Cronenberg, famous for body-horror films, has also adapted Ballard’s 1973 novel into a filmic version, *Crash* (1996). It doesn’t quite translate.

notes on method

Modern myths are even less understood than ancient myths, although we are devoured by myths. (Balzac, 1836: 936).

I had to find the code. The code said: GET RID OF MEANING. YOUR MIND IS A NIGHTMARE THAT HAS BEEN EATING YOU: NOW EAT YOUR MIND (Acker, 1998: 264-265).

Using Lawrence Grossberg's theory of cultural articulation, my dissertation is a self-reflexive construction "of identity on top of difference, of unities out of fragments, [and] of structures across practices" (54).⁷ As Hall clarifies, the "theory of articulation" is one which recognizes that "the political connotation of ideological elements has no necessary belongingness," so we need "to think the contingent, the non-necessary, connection between different practices—between ideology and social forces, and between different elements within ideology, and between different social groups composing a social movement, etc." ("On postmodernism and articulation" 142). Thus "articulation, [is] the non-necessary link, between a social force which is making itself, and the ideology or conceptions of the world which makes intelligible the process they are going through," which is relevant because "the popular force of an organic ideology always depends upon the social groups that can be articulated to and by it" (144). Expanding on Stuart Hall's concept of articulation, Grossberg looks at how practices and effects link up in the cultural imaginary and political reality. Articulation is what allows for the "production of identity on top of difference, of unities out of fragments, [and] of structures across practices" (54). Together, then, the different parts of the dissertation represent a critical articulation, one which "links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics"

⁷ As Hall explains, "I always use the word 'articulation', though I don't know whether the meaning I attribute to it is perfectly understood. In England, the term has a nice double meaning because 'articulate' means to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. It carries that sense of language-ing, of expressing, etc. But we also speak of an 'articulated' lorry (truck): a lorry where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another" ("On postmodernism and articulation" 141).

(54). As “the practice of history and its critical reconstruction,” the dissertation “reworks the context into which practices are inserted” in order to “redefine the possibilities of life by redefining the field of relations” (64). Across the ever-shifting terrain of culture, literature, and everyday life, the cultural analyst attempts to map the “interrelated vectors” of articulation and the ways in which such articulations “penetrate into and affect reality” (61). Rejecting the communication model of cultural studies, Grossberg’s theory does not conflate popular culture with communication. Erroneously, the communication model assumes that “two discrete and independently existing entities” can be analyzed, which means that culture can be reduced to texts and “human reality to the plane of meaning” (38, 43). Alternatively, Grossberg’s theory of cultural articulation is “anti-essentialist,” so while “connections or identities are never intrinsic or guaranteed,” they are “always...real and effective” (53). In other words, to understand a specific cultural practice, its context must be “theoretically and historically (re)-constructed” through the process of articulation (55). And, since practices operate on different “planes of effects,” and effects are always uneven, articulations construct “both sympathetic reinforcements and antagonistic contradictions” (57). Thus, I look at how New Wave SF and psychonaut countercultures “reshape the contexts of people’s lives” in order to map a topography of “popular culture and daily life” (66). While it is tempting to relate popular culture to my literary artifacts, and daily life to my cultural practices, Grossberg shows that no easy separation of these realms is possible. I construct a cognitive and affective map of the American territory, which is at least partially conceivable through the looping combination of theoretical, historical, and textual analysis. This avoids the pitfalls of “the discursive position,” which “is often in danger of losing its reference to material practice and historical conditions,” and means not “deserting that terrain but rather, using it as one’s reference point” (“On postmodernism and articulation” 147).

This framework enables the New Wave and New Age to be “grasped as a single historical and aesthetic phenomenon,” allowing for “the survival of the primary text at one of its poles” to serve as “a guide-rail for the bewildering exploration of the aesthetic universe which lies at the other, a message mass or semiotic bombardment from which the textual referent has disappeared” (“Reification and Utopia” 138). The project investigates “*practical and theoretical activities*” in a way which does not accuse these disparate formations of “mistaking cultural production for political action” (Cohn-Bendit qtd. in McKay 13, 4). The dissertation works through the possibilities and problematics of New Wave styled self-hacking and its relation to shared subcultures. Across all three chapters, I am interested in altered states of mind that result from literal, literary, and linguistic experiments, and the relays between these modified mental states and the critical, cultural, and constructive project of reprogramming somatic and semantic modes (of being) and prescriptive and perceptual codes (of conduct). It insists on the methodological necessity to define literary texts as doing cultural work, not just stylistic or linguistic innovation. The New Wave writers in my archive break the basic codes and conventions of the SF genre so they might *use* literature differently; however, they keep coming back to engage with the genre of SF in order to remake it while remaking themselves. They return again and again to the popular as a site of contested cultural terrain that can be reparatively reworked. In the words of Hall, “For something to become popular entails a struggle; it is never a simple process...It doesn’t just happen” (“On postmodernism and articulation” 141). Unlike the “reductionist and eliminativist,” who seeks “to demystify and discredit,” my work on New Wave SF and American counterculture is relentlessly reparative, radical, and of course “expansive” (Shaviro 21). Ballard says, “perhaps the great value of literary form is its ability to bring together apparently unconnected and dissimilar ideas” in materials culled from radically different registers (Time, Memory, and Inner Space” 200).

The dissertation sketches a preliminary chart that tracks the coevolution of interpenetrating cultural formations that developed, at least emergently, in the mid-late 20th century, and which extend, at least residually, to the present day. Moving through and across aesthetic/literary creations, theoretical/political formulations, and social/cultural constructions, the dissertation traces certain networks that reticulate individual identity and affect, political communities and affiliations, and cultural configurations and practices. Staging the inextricable entanglements of literary and cultural formations, the dissertation maps from the liminal places between inner and outer space(s) within ultramodern times when, as Ballard insists, “everything is becoming science fiction” (“Fictions of Every Kind” 205). New Wave is referred to as the so-called ‘Modernist moment’ in the critic’s trajectory of SF, suggesting a new emergence of experimental writing during the period, which coincided with an increased interest in other experimental practices as shown in the examples of drugs, cults, and cut-ups (McHale 259). Somewhat of a critical commonplace, this “dual articulation” of New Wave SF and countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s is recognizable as a “cultural formation,” in part due to their concurrent sociohistorical development (Grossberg 72). So, my dissertation is meant to facilitate a more systematic investigation into the animating ethos underlying the literary and cultural cross-linking, which includes “affective alliances” and “lines of flight” (398).⁸ To understand how “certain textual practices...articulated to...other cultural practices,” we must first identify the “mode of their articulation” (70, 56). New Wave SF is a literary movement and inward-turning transitional form in the genre’s evolution that serves as a baseline from which to chart its more tenuous cultural

⁸ “Lines of flight” is from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), which Grossberg defines as “vectors of effectivity which disrupt and escape any particular structure of power” (398). Lines of flight are positive or negative, depending on if they transform “the multiplicity” and “connect with other multiplicities” (9); they are part of what Deleuze theorizes as “a rhizome,” which theoretically “establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (*Thousand Plateaus* 7).

connections to drugs, cults, and cut-ups alongside its more contemporary literary descendants that followed in the wake of the New Wave. In fact, I argue that the prehistory and afterlife of the New Wave is far less obvious and a great deal more profound than either the cultural commonsense or the critical scholarship has yet to acknowledge in their more preliminary coupling and assessment of the overlapping cycles of science fiction, literary fiction, and popular culture. In my archive of literary and cultural ‘texts,’ it is important to understand how the New Wave manifests as hyper-aesthetic and/or anti-aesthetic in its engagements with and departures from both Modernism and postmodernism as periodizing concepts. As literary critic Andreas Huyssen argues, while the “Modernist project” required cordoning off “mass culture,” the postmodernist project is marked by “its attempt to negotiate forms of high art with certain forms...of mass culture and the culture of the everyday” (47, 59).

literature and language

I’m concerned with the precise manipulation of word and image to create...an alteration in the reader’s consciousness (Burroughs, 1965: 56).

I don’t know what to do about all that I see and experience. I can only ask **dream** (Acker, 1993: 215).

McHale’s critical work on postmodernist fiction and cyberpunk SF provides a theoretical model that is useful for thinking about Modernist fiction and New Wave SF. According to McHale, the dominant concern of Modernist literature was epistemology, and though its perspectivism “multiplied points of view on the world,” it didn’t challenge “the underlying unity of the self” (254). So, McHale explains, while Modernism veered “toward fragmentation and decentering,” these “centrifugal tendencies” weren’t fully developed until “the emergence of a postmodernist poetics” (254). This ontological turn had “radical consequences for literary models of the self” because if the “category of ‘world’ is plural, unstable, and problematic,” so too is its “model of the

self” (253-254). In postmodernist fiction, the “fragmentation and dispersal of self” is represented “figuratively, through linguistic, structural, or visual metaphors, rather than literally, in the persons of characters who undergo some kind of literal disintegrative experience”; while McHale associates this “literal disintegrative experience” with cyberpunk SF of the 1980s, he is also making an argument that connects this cyberpunk thematic to postmodernist writing (254). Still, he cites “Pynchon and Sukenick” as notable postmodernist exceptions because their writing has “characters who fracture or disintegrate not at all metaphorically (psychologically), but ontologically” (254). So, while traditional SF is “ontologically oriented like postmodernist fiction,” it often omits “the consequences of its ontological pluralism and experimentalism for its model for the self” (254). Historically speaking, SF as a genre has “tended to neutralize the issue of (re)presentation of self by keeping characterization generally ‘thin,’ ‘shallow,’ and impoverished, strictly subordinated to the foreground category of ‘world’” (254-255). McHale elucidates these generic discontinuities and clarifies their uneven development, saying,

In this respect we might even say...that traditional SF, otherwise so ‘pre-modernist’ in its orientation, has always been postmodernist. ‘The disappearance of character (in the traditional sense) from contemporary (‘postmodern’) fiction,’ writes Christine Brooke-Rose (1981:102), ‘is one of the ways in which SF and the more ‘serious,’ experimental fiction have come close together’; character, newly absent from ‘serious’ fiction, has always been absent from SF (255).

McHale laments the fact that while the “theme of the centrifugal self...in cyberpunk SF...[is] essentially incompatible with the perspectivist narrative strategies of modernist fiction,” many cyberpunk authors have nevertheless regressed into the “perspectivist structural clichés inherited from modernist poetics” as “SF’s own modernist generation, the so-called ‘New Wave’ SF” (259). This summary description (and dismissal) of the New Wave seems ill-considered. I argue New Wave SF deviates from traditional SF and aligns with modernism with respect to characterization

(and psychological realism); whereas it deviates from modernism and aligns with traditional SF with respect to world-building (and sociological extrapolation). Of course, it also significantly alters and amends what it adopts and adapts from both of these literary predecessors. At the same time, New Wave SF deviates from the modernist “centered, centripetal self” in some ways and aligns with the postmodernist and cyberpunk “centrifugal self” as they are defined by McHale in others (260, 259). I’d also add that it is not clear how psychological disintegration is a ‘metaphor,’ particularly when a character’s psychological disintegration is the primary means by which we access (or assess) the ontological status of the textual world. As Gregory Bateson says, “It is awkward to refer constantly to both epistemology and ontology and incorrect to suggest that they are separable in human natural history” (442).⁹

I argue that the literary texts in my archive show how the somewhat earlier—and overlapping—generic formation of New Wave SF marks a crossing between Modernist and postmodernist literary tendencies. I complicate some of McHale’s critical work that positions cyberpunk SF of the 1980s as the ‘postmodern moment’ of the SF genre, while simultaneously challenging the assumption that New Wave SF of the 1960s and 1970s is easily categorized as its ‘Modernist moment.’ Similarly, the selection of texts I examine have some of the literary trappings of cyberpunk, and yet they are also more significantly building on the repertoire of literary techniques of the New Wave. In the historical context of the SF genre, set apart from the literary

⁹ Applying cybernetic and systems theory to popular thought and philosophy, Gregory Bateson is similarly “concerned especially with that group of premises upon which Occidental concepts of the ‘self’ are built, and, conversely, with premises which are corrective to [the]...Occidental errors associated with that concept” (“The cybernetic self” 442). The answer in short is that nondualism is correct, which aligns with ideas in New Wave SF. He continues: “The ‘self’ is a false reification of an improperly delimited part of this much larger field of interlocking processes,” which is “a thinking-and-acting system” (453). “The mind,” according to Bateson, “is immanent in the larger system-man plus environment” and “to philosophers who have thought about the implications of cybernetics and systems theory,” this should be clear (444). Epistemological and ontological problems extend from “the widest universe [to] the deepest psychological levels”; and “if we ask about what happens when premises are changed, it becomes clear that these two definitions...overlap to a very great extent. If a man achieves or suffers change in premises which are deeply embedded in his mind, he will surely find that the results of that change will ramify throughout his whole universe” (455, 440).

genealogies of Modernist and postmodernist writing, McHale explains how and why the SF tradition is paradoxical for periodization. At the level of literary form, SF builds on an undeniably “pre-modernist” machinery, while also tacking on other “postmodernist” parts (244). Conveniently, McHale skips right over the ‘modernist’ intermediary apparatus in what is otherwise his descriptive specificity of the generic contraption that is SF. This is precisely the ‘part’ of the generic ‘mechanism’ in New Wave SF which is most unusual is its unique repurposing of itself as a literary ‘device.’ A literary device, of course, is also a type of literal device, but New Wavers have a tenuous (and tenacious) grasp on this concept that does not allow for the visceral (and veridical) element to slip. The inner workings shift gears to gain traction where the centripetally-oriented ‘modernist’ text and the centrifugally-oriented ‘postmodernist’ text could not; using a double-movement that spins one way and then within that rotation turns again now in the opposite direction allows for the center to hold by virtue of its continuous displacement.¹⁰ The switch point (or “movable tongue”) is the defining feature of the New Wave in that it constructs a SF narrative which seems to move outwardly in a forward direction but can just as easily stop in its tracks and reverse engineer the process, going backward and turning inward in an inset cycle not visible at its outset. The centripetal (or inward-facing) dynamism of the New Wave thus actually derives from its apparent centrifugal (or outward-facing) SF directionality. New Wave SF thus problematizes epistemology and ontology at once by always emphasizing the *relation between self and world*. Complicating the modernist/postmodernist split which McHale says results from a split between epistemology/ontology (or, synonymously for McHale, between self/world), Hayles maintains,

¹⁰ The ‘chi’ of ‘taji (also known as ‘tai chi’) or ‘qigong’ (pronounced ‘chee gong’) refers to the centering of the body in a yoga position, which of course in this Taoist practice *moves*. Like the description of the ‘Tao,’ which says: at the center of the movement, they found stillness; and at the center of stillness, movement, and this they called the Tao (*Tao Te Ching* XXV, XI). Or, as Ursula K. Le Guin writes in her New Wave novel, *The Farthest Shore* (1972), “The Balance is not a stillness. It is a movement—an eternal becoming” (423).

“Dick is intensely concerned with *epistemological questions* and their relation to the cybernetic paradigm” precisely because of how these epistemological questions “reveal how shaky our constructions of *reality* can be”; “cybernetics radically destabilizes the *ontological foundations* of what counts as human” (24, emphasis mine).

McHale argues that cyberpunk, “the latest wave of SF writing,” “rejects the speculative dominant of...New Wave SF, and swings back to extrapolative world-building, while at the same time retaining certain elements of New Wave poetics” (245). The American New Wave SF examined in my chapters resembles this description in its near-future extrapolative world-building, which can also be accounted for through its closer relation to the realism of both American Modernism and ‘hard SF’ in the American context (as defined by John Campbell); however, it retains the “speculative dominant of...New Wave SF” in its literary treatment of technology which is used to emphasize or dramatize aspects of language, ideology, and culture (as seen in the relatively weak SF ‘novums’). British New Wave SF developed outside this specifically American situation and, I argue, this makes it more clearly separable from traditional SF (and the American pulps) in its elaborations of inner space, which also have a more direct relation to the psychological focus and experimental aesthetic of British Modernism. McHale also argues that “whatever else cyberpunk may be, it is also...a convenient name for the kind of writing that springs up where the converging trajectories of SF poetics and postmodernist poetics final cross” (245). Again, the American New Wave SF surveyed in my chapters shows that this earlier wave of SF writing also arose “from the interaction and mutual interference of SF and mainstream postmodernist writing” (245). Of course, the shift from Modernism to postmodernism plays out very differently in SF which has been resistant to Modernism because it has been understood as subjective and not representational, yet at the same time SF is not postmodernism’s ‘literature of exhaustion’ because

of the way that the genre understands everything as ‘new.’ New Wave SF in general, and the American New Wave in particular, can thus be seen as doing and undoing Modernism, while also articulating and disarticulating certain elements of a postmodernist poetics. Narrowing the scope of literary analysis to focus on a selection of American New Wave SF and widening the frame to include a set of interrelated American New Age countercultures allows for a different critical intensity, theoretical sharpness, and panoramic exposure to appear in a snapshot of American literature and culture. As Walter Benjamin says, “the true picture of the past flits by” (“Theses on Philosophy of History” 257). I have selected countercultural figures who were clearly influenced by the development of cybernetics and who also attempted to apply its theories and disseminate them into the popular practice of everyday life; I have selected literary texts that prefigured cyberpunk and its motif of self-hacking put alongside more contemporary texts that inherited this legacy from these earlier New Wave/New Age prototypes. The wider temporal swath of New Wave SF ranging from the 1960s to the late 1990s and the narrower spatial set of New Wave SF in the American context enables a new spatiotemporal framework to isolate different lines of connection and to activate different vectors of possibility, and in this way to answer different critical questions. Like cyberpunk, the American New Wave SF in my literary archive “shares with mainstream postmodernist fiction: motifs of what might be called ‘worldness’; motifs of the centrifugal self; and motifs of death, both individual and collective” (McHale 246-247). And like British New Wave SF, the American New Wave SF in my literary archive shares with mainstream Modernist fiction: motifs of what might be called ‘subjectiveness’; motifs of the centripetal self; and motifs of continuity, both individual and collective. This cross-coding between Modernist and postmodernist writing styles creates a temporal flux which allows for a sort of extended postmodernist ‘moment’ of the New Wave of SF to be tracked through the specifically American context, which only

appears when put in relation to its textual predecessors and SF contemporaries, such as American Modernism and the British New Wave, for example, in addition to the even more contemporary literature that McHale cites in his analysis of postmodernist fiction and cyberpunk more broadly.¹¹ I argue that the American New Wave SF texts in my chapters document a hidden circuit, or short circuit, in which the metalepsis point between inner and outer space is complicated and concealed. In this way, the slide between ontological levels is quite a bit more subtle than in McHale's examples, which also gives it a different literary texture than the New Wave stylistic as it is more typically seen and studied, with what I argue is a coded psychological transgression that awards it more popular and political reach.

McHale defines "cyberpunk practice" to illustrate an alternative to "traditional SF," which likewise deviates from postmodernist fiction; he argues that 1980s cyberpunk fiction tends to "actualize or literalize what...normally appears as a metaphor" in postmodernist texts (255). While this is true, I maintain that New Wave SF demarcates an earlier alternative to traditional SF that is distinct from Modernist modes of writing and has more in common with McHale's cyberpunk SF (and his notable postmodernist exceptions) than he seems to think. Particularly in the American New Wave, there are comparable attempts to "actualize or literalize" what typically would appear "as a metaphor," yet which tend to be read as if they were not 'actual or literal' but somehow 'merely psychological.' (This warrants asking what it even *means* for something to be 'merely psychological,' or what makes psychology so 'mere,' but this question is better answered through a positive engagement with the primary texts than as an idle point of negative speculation.) The

¹¹ My use of 'cross-coding' here riffs on Frederic Jameson's concept of "transcoding" (*Cultural Logic* 393). Jonathan Crewe argues, "Whether [it is] applied directly or by way of analogy to [explain the process of] cultural change, the term *transcoding* signifies a complex [practice] of displacement, substitution, and transposition from one discursive code to another... from one general code-language to another" (892). Transcoding literally refers to digital-to-digital conversion of one encoding format to another and entails what's called "generation loss" (the lessening of quality on account of the data compression which is accrued in the conversion process as well as in its successive conversions).

most clear-cut example of this critical elision is found in drugs, which are obviously ‘actual’ or ‘literal,’ and yet which are still liable to be read as though they functioned “metaphorically (psychologically)” (as in the more ‘modernist’ New Wave) instead of ‘really’ functioning physiologically or “ontologically” (as in the more ‘postmodernist’ cyberpunk) (260). This is perhaps the most commonly used literary device of the standard examples of American New Wave/SF, which is also not merely a ‘literary’ device as the major writers were themselves infamous drug users. Drugs are physical (actual, literal, material) objects that are taken into the body (and mind) just as surely as any other technology imagined in cyberpunk (or its subgenre, biopunk). The main difference seems to be in the technological visibility, the actual possibility, and/or the perceived acceptability of the subsequent fictive alterations achieved by these disparate cybernetic means (prosthetic enhancements v. chemical modifications — or, shifting registers of ‘the real’ from self-to-world — computer-generated cyberspace v. brain-simulated psychic space). In my dissertation, the literary productions and cultural practices are held together by their mutual reliance on the “literal disintegrative experience,” which unhinges the “centered, centripetal self” both “metaphorically (psychologically)” and “ontologically” after which selves and worlds may appear as equally unstable but *reappear in relation* to one another (260, 254). The unifying theme of my literary and cultural archive is literary theorist Julian Wolfrey’s “sense of transgressions-plural,” in which transgression occurs as an aesthetic, social, or personal “response to the political, ideological, cultural, and historical demands for stability and self-sameness in the constitution of identity” (8). Indeed, in his words, such “transgression is always the limitless capacity of the subject to break its own limits and still remain itself” (9). In a gloss, the dissertation documents a series of more-or-less embodied experiments that intersect between textual objects and cultural practices to position plural selves in multiple relations to multiple worlds. As Fredric Jameson

points out, postmodernism is affectively experienced in “negative terms of anxiety and loss of reality”; still, he admits, it can also be reinterpreted “in the positive terms of euphoria, a high, an intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity” (*Cultural Logic* 27-28). I work against the imposition of binary logic, which is coded as either terrifying *or* exhilarating but never *together at the same time*. In the self-contradictory *modus operandi* of the literary and cultural ‘texts’ looked at in my project, detaching is a means of *latching on*, unhinging is a method of *hooking up*, and taking off is a way of *touching down*.

Particularly in the American countercultural figures, but also in several of the New Wave SF texts, the literal disintegrative experience of self is also used as a way to regain a sense of inner-unity or wholeness in connection to the outer world, which opens onto ontology (the nature of the world) rather than staying locked into only epistemology (the knowledge of the self). In the subcultural practices of drugs, cults, and cut-ups, these subjective experiences are in veritably described as “real,” as a way of actually perceiving the way the world really “is.” This recognizes the fact that *feeling* both defines and drives cognition, and the denaturalization of basic perceptual experiences creates an ontological opening toward that which had previously been blocked off by epistemological assumptions. The intensely reparative aspect to the New Wave and countercultural practices is found in its installation of a new belief that counters disenchantment with a sort of magical quality, which is wholly unlike Jameson’s postmodernist paradigm or McHale’s centrifugal self. Ego-dissolution is thus recast as a good thing, not just as the epistemological idea that the self is nothing, but as a reintegration into the ontology of the world and of the self as something far stranger than we can ‘think.’ In the positive version of these disintegrative experiences, not only is the person still a part of the world, but they also *feel themselves* to be a part of it again and it registers as *real*. For perhaps the first time in the long *durée*, a sort of literal

“metalepsis” returns us to the primary reality plane of ontology in a way that is de-alienated from sociocultural norms of postmodernity proper, and refamiliarized by the estranging countercultural practices of a peculiar postmodernism. This reparatively reframes and realizes the literary scholar Ihab Hassan’s paranoid theory of postmodernism “as a kind of 20th Century gnosis,” in which thinking what seems wrong leads to doing what feels right which in turn can come back to theorizing from a new perspective with a different affective orientation (33). In *doing* everything wrong, some things inexplicably *come round right*; the turn inward to face outward is a new direction that requires a special kind of disorientation which reorients toward thinking *through* feeling. The breakdown of postmodernist form—both in literature and in life—thus appears as the necessary precursor of reconceptualization, reconciliation, and ultimately perhaps a new form of reintegration. As Hassan so brilliantly describes this contradictory aspect

[of] postmodernism veers toward open, playful, optative, disjunctive, displaced, or indeterminate forms, a discourse of fragments, an ideology of fracture, a will to unmaking, an invocation of silences—veers toward all these and yet implies their very opposites, their antithetical realities (36).

This sort of double movement is the inward-turning, outward-reaching mode of the New Wave that I try to capture in my dissertation project taken as a whole. In a final comparison to modernism, postmodernism represents a “lateral movement—not so much an advancement as a realignment,” which tries to move toward what literary critic David Herman describes as a “general theoretical commitment to the emancipatory or utopian energies of cultural production” (57). The New Wave SF studied in my second and third chapter, admittedly of a darker variety than the 1960s New Age counterculture discussed in this first chapter, which it extends beyond temporally while extending on thematically, still looks for what the literary critic Barry Chabot says, citing Jerome Klinkowitz and Alan Wilde, “[is] the affirmative moment [that] defines postmodern fiction” (7).

Viewing the New Wave as a SF mode of Modernist writing without articulating postmodern transformations misses the historical fact that the human species was recently inundated with “new technology-mediated forms of recognition and self-identification,” which have disrupted the *two-way* “boundaries of subjectivity” and “psychic interiority” (Hayles 20). It also neglects “the issue of how ideology becomes internalized, how we come to speak...within the categories of thought...which can more accurately be said to think us” (“Marxism without guarantees” 30). The project of cultural studies necessitates “borrowing and bending the forms and styles of popular thought” to forge an alliance across “hegemony and common sense” (“Embodied Pedagogy” 279). This is “the work of translation” and “finding ways of addressing different audiences,” which also means “reintroducing, reintegrating the subjective dimension in a non- holistic, non- unitary way” (“Embodied Pedagogy” 275; “On postmodernism and articulation” 145). The “whole dimension of subjectivity” is what the “discursive perspective” brings back into play, according to Hall, which dislocates it from the Modernist mode and reworks it through poststructuralist theories of language and ideology (qtd. in “Embodied Pedagogy” 279). For all these reasons, to use the words of Hall,

It is clear why we should generate, out of these fundamental categories for which we have found everyday words, phrases, and idiomatic expressions in practical consciousness, the *model* of other social and political relations (38, *emphasis in original*).

Such translations—from nomenclature to vernacular—are necessary for there to be hope of what Hall describes as “transformations of consciousness,” which occur at key intersections of the self and a society, the organism and an environment, and a formation and its articulation (40). Together and apart, the dissertation sections attempt “to cut into the process at another point, frame another set of questions, and bring to the surface...what the overwhelming facticity...constantly renders invisible” (38). Grappling with the real and theoretical and moving between levels of abstraction is of utmost importance because to engage both the subjective and social world, one must “buy

into it, inflect it, develop it, clarify it,” because people have been interpellated by the discourse of the popular and so in this way have “come to a certain kind of consciousness” (“On postmodernism and articulation” 143). In other words, the very language of SF has saturated postmodernity to such a degree that its form has a particular psychological and sociological salience that is unique to the era. As SF critic and author Samuel Delany argues, what Ballard critiques in “modern science fiction,” by which he means SF of the “thirty-year period 1926-1957, from Gernback’s founding of *Amazing*,” was, “despite the primitive and vulgar verbal trappings,” still more akin to the “impulse behind poetry than it was to the impulse behind ordinary narrative fiction” (“The Cosmic Cabaret” 203; *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* 23).

Delany notes that “science fiction was the most fertile area of writing in the production of new words which endured in the language—a position held up till the mid-thirties by poetry” (23). Delany continues, which connects in my view the strangely situated inner/outer status of post-structuralist ideas of language generally to the language of SF specifically, something that can then be applied to thinking about the project of the New Wave poetics and post-Saussurean linguistics,

the new American SF took on the practically incantatory task of naming nonexistent objects, then investing them with reality by a host of methods, technological and pseudotechnological explanations, imbedding them in dramatic situations, *or just inculcating them by pure repetition*...the incantatory functions—a better word than predictive—is not more the chief concern of modern Sf than it is the chief concern of modern poetry; *though remnants of it still linger in everything* (23, emphasis mine).¹²

¹² Delany comments on the lack of SF poetry and offers a four-word poem to illustrate the way words are inculcated through repetition so that one does not see the words, their parts, or consider their alternate meanings in other contexts:

Television
Rocketship
Waldo
Spacesuit

This observation makes the New Wave poetics, the Yage poetry, and the Earthseed verses particularly interesting (23).

An important figure in Ballard's theorization of the New Wave, Burroughs's work creates a crucial crosslink at the core of the dissertation project. His use of the cut-up technique is itself an example, albeit in exaggerated form, of using writing and reading as a mode of consciousness alteration and a way to achieve altered states of mind through embodied practices—"what Burroughs called 'routines'" ("Sticking to his Guns" 135). As Ballard argues, Burroughs's New Wave SF shows "that the whole of science fiction's imaginary universe has...been absorbed into the general consciousness" ("Myth Maker of the Twentieth Century" 130). Ballard resumes, saying, "whatever his reservations about some aspects of the mid-twentieth century," Burroughs wholeheartedly "accepts that it can only be described in terms of its own language, idioms, and verbal lore" (126). Burroughs's work is a part "of the casual vocabulary of the space age, shared by all people born after the year 1920," one which draws heavily on science fiction's vernacular (129). Likewise, as the well-regarded New Wave SF writer Frederik Pohl would proclaim, "there are bits and pieces from [Hubbard's] work that became part of the language in ways that very few other writers managed" (qtd. in "American Pulp Fiction" 113). And lastly, Lilly's idea of "metaprogramming," or "self-metaprogramming," relates to the "new level of structure" that brought "a new capability" in humans, which is entirely language-based: "when one learns to learn, one is making models, using symbols, analogizing, making metaphors, *in short, inventing and using language*" (*Programming and Metaprogramming* 6, emphasis mine). The New Wave writers and New Age thinkers take up language in new ways that are distinctive to the postmodern period in which language itself appears as a technology of consciousness. Indeed, a life-long addict, Burroughs claimed that he had "achieved pure cut-up highs," and argued that the "use of consciousness-expanding drugs could show the way to obtain the useful aspects of hallucinogenic experience, without any chemical agent. Anything that can be done chemically can be done in other ways, with

sufficient knowledge of the mechanisms involved” (*The Job* 131). As Ballard points out, the title for *Naked Lunch* was suggested by Jack Kerouac in reference to “the addict’s fix, or the rush of pure sensation” (“Hitman for the Apocalypse” 132). Another committed drug user, Dick similarly said, “one doesn’t have to depend on hallucinations; one can unhinge oneself by many other roads” (“Drugs, Hallucinations, and the Quest for Reality” 173). The New Wave SF in my archive, I argue, is particularly attuned to how “such processes of diversity and fragmentation, which modernism first tried to name, have gone much further, are technologically underpinned in new ways, and have penetrated more deeply into mass consciousness, etc.” in the postmodern period (“On postmodernism and articulation” 138).

word virus

Truth is here when all the words are rubbed out. Words were made to lie with. We make truth. Nobody else makes it. There is no truth we don’t make. Punch a hole in the Big Lie. Punch a hole for me (Burroughs, 1997: 191).

I saw Death in the horror of the simultaneity of the frightfulness and the sweetness of language, of human communication (Acker, 1993: 265).

In “Plato’s Pharmacy” (1972), linguist and philosopher Jacques Derrida defines the Greek word “*pharmakon*” in the Derridean sense of having a double meaning: it is the “poison” which is also the “cure” (430, emphasis in original). The essay, of course, refers to the development of writing itself in the history of Western civilization, which in ancient Greek philosophy doesn’t begin until Plato. Socrates, who was Plato’s teacher, used an oral tradition and wrote nothing down so we only get access to what Socrates *said* through what Plato *wrote*. Socrates, unlike Plato and his student Aristotle, believed that the introduction of the written word to Greek culture would bring its destruction. My project dramatically restages these primary claims, which view both the advent of writing and the act of writing as a means of consciousness alteration—this historical

notion of writing's role in the 'evolution' of modern civilization moves between the highest and lowest levels of abstraction, from the present to the past, the public to the private, and the social to the subject (430). This fundamental paradox of writing as *pharmakon* is evidenced throughout Burroughs's writing; in which, he explains, "the written word was literally a virus," before going on to theorize "writing as [the] inoculation" (*Revised Boy Scout Manual: Electronic Revolution* 5; *Queer* 128). Obviously, a vaccine that inoculates one from a virus is derived from the virus itself, replicating Derrida's idea that the poison which is also the source of the anecdote is necessarily the cure.¹³ Writing, drugs, and technology, then, are in some significant ways synonymous terms, at least from this historical vantage, which can theoretically lead to either liberation and/or control:

[the] word of course is one of the most powerful instruments of control as exercised by the newspaper and images as well, there are both words and images in newspapers... Now if you start cutting these up and rearranging them you are breaking down the control system (*The Job* 41).

What exactly Burroughs means by his phrase "word virus" is plainly stated in the excerpt below:

The Word is literally a virus, and it has not been recognised as such because it has achieved a state of relatively stable symbiosis with its human host... But the Word clearly bears the single identifying feature of virus: it is an organism with no internal function other than to replicate itself (*The Adding Machine* 47).

So, Burroughs's 'cut-up technique' provides the literal, literary means to crack the codes of the language system and hack into its ideological control mechanisms. This acknowledges the force of the collective unconscious and locates its 'primary programming' in shared structures of language, which is itself essentially an elaborate 'scrambling device' (a remix of letters and words):

¹³ This Derridean idea of the *pharmakon* as a drug in which the poison is the cure aligns with the serpent-entwined staff as wielded by the Greek God Asclepius, a symbol which has historically been used for the arts of healing and medicine. The more well-known symbol, however, has two snakes around a winged staff and is the rod of Hermes, or Caduceus. The U.S. Army Medical Corps mistook one for the other and adopted the wrong Greek symbol for a branch plaque in 1902. The single snake-coiled staff of Asclepius has the same internal logic of "the poison that is the cure."

The original purpose of scrambling devices was to make the message unintelligible without the unscrambling code. Another use for speech scramblers could be to impose thought control on a mass scale. *Consider the human body and nervous system as unscrambling devices... Remember that when the human nervous system unscrambles a scrambled message this will seem to the subject like his very own ideas which just occurred to him, which indeed it did...In most cases he will not suspect its extraneous origin.* That is the run of the mill newspaper reader who receives the scrambled message uncritically and assumes that it reflects his own opinions independently arrived at. *On the other hand, the subject may recognize or suspect the extraneous origin of voices that are literally hatching out in his head* (*The Job* 297, emphasis mine).¹⁴

The insidious part of ideology as inscribed in language (the ‘scrambling device’) is its apparent origin, which pops into the minds (‘unscrambling devices’) of its users as if it were spontaneous (from inside) and not extraneous (from outside). Ideology like language has a circularity to it which is self-justifying, self-reinforcing, and self-correcting; the ideological effect is one in which the ideas and opinions of the society in question are mistaken for conclusions that the individuals in that society have independently arrived at. This form of unconscious coercion is comparable to computer programming, in which language functions like a daemon program running in the background without direct user interface. Here is the connection to the figure of the cyborg because “[what] makes this figure so tragic is the extent to which he has been programmed to believe in his own autonomy” (Plant 99). Burroughs believes, like Donna Haraway in “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985), that writing is a technology of cyborgs (which, in the context of language as a technology

¹⁴ In an interview, Butler discussed how one of the Earthseed verses “was written as a direct reflection to something she felt was happening around her all too often: ‘I got the idea for it when I heard someone answer a political question with a political slogan. He didn’t seem to understand that he was quoting someone else, he seemed to have thought that he had a creative thought’” (qtd. Reid-X 10). Butler relayed the Earthseed verse from *Parable of the Talents* that she wrote in response to this accidental ideological recapitulation, which is precisely what Burroughs describes in this passage as representing a form of “thought control on a mass scale” where the “extraneous origin” of ideology and language as disseminated by the mass media is not fully realized because of the ‘transparent’ function of language: “Beware: All too often, / We say / What we hear others say. / We think / What we’re told that we think. / We see / What we’re permitted to see. / Repetition and pride are the keys to this” (*Talents* 313). In his journal, Burroughs wrote: “Nixon...said Leary was ‘the most dangerous man in America.’ Dangerous to who exactly. How about a virus that forces the subject to speak the truth as he sees it” (*Last Words* 82, emphasis in original).

and cyborgs as human-technology symbionts, are humans) and this technology of writing can be reappropriated for deprogramming (which is always also reprogramming). Burroughs's 'word virus' and 'control addict' represent both intersubjective and societally-driven impositions or imperatives. Language is regarded in its parasitic relation to subject and society, as opposed to a symbiotic mutualism, which is implicit in the definition of the 'human-cyborg' as opposed to "a human-technology symbiont" (*Natural-Born Cyborgs* 27). In Appendix IV of *The Soft Machine* (1968), Burroughs explains, "the soft machine is the human body under constant siege from a vast hungry host of parasites with many names but one nature being hungry and one intention to eat" (209). Like Haraway, who argues deprogramming is necessary to "subvert command and control," Burroughs realizes this not possible without reprogramming. To counteract internal and external mechanisms of the "control machine," which produce "recording and playback," we must generate our own "counterrecording and playback" (*RBSM: ER* 168). In order to "subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture," the cyborg must construct new origin myths, not just deconstruct the old ones ("Cyborg Manifesto" 175). Instead of just short-circuiting control, Burroughs attempts to reroute its circuitry. To complete Burroughs's mission, or the requisite task of cracking the codes of "command and control," we must first, or simultaneously, undertake Haraway's prerequisite "task of recoding communication and intelligence" (175).

These language "parasites occupy a complex position between inside and out, neither wholly supplementary nor essential to the subject" (Melley 47). When Burroughs says, "Language is a virus from outer space," I suggest this is a less familiar use of the language of science fiction intent on dramatizing the fact that language is not from *inner space* as what seems to emanate from within the 'self' is wholly constructed from what has been taken in from *outer space*, meaning the space outside of one's inner space (*Nova Express* 54). This explains in some ways the curiously-

oriented project of New Wave SF, which uses something (language) from *outer space* in order to expose or represent or chart the invisible landscapes of *inner space*. The inward-turn in what is an outward-facing genre re-appropriates conventional formulations of “cognitive estrangement” with what Burroughs calls the “Alien word” (*Nova Express* 12). So, while Ballard says, “The only truly alien planet is Earth,” and “it is *inner space*, not outer, that needs to be explored,” Burroughs shows the way that inner space has been colonized by the word virus just as surely as outer space has, and that the alien planet is not just the Earth but also the inner realm in which the alien word has its ‘headquarters,’ so to speak (“Which Way to Inner Space?” 197, emphasis in original). The cut-up method thus appears as a kind of postmodern parallel to the literal use of literary techniques in SF to generate alternate modes of consciousness *of cognition*, as Shaviro argues, which is of particular importance because of the emphasis New Wave writers like Ballard put on Burroughs’s work. Burroughs advises on the purpose of the cut-up method, which reinvigorates what has become the rote function of language, even poetic or literary language, in the age of mass media saturation and viral vocabulary proliferation (note the purposeful misspelling exposes the relation between two words—‘here’ and ‘hear’—which has been severed through overuse and new media as well as through the seeming transparency of spelling and its assumed preeminence over sound):

Take any poet or writer you fancy. Heresay, or poems you have read over many times. *The words have lost meaning and life through years of repetition*. Now take the poem and type out selected passages. Fill a page with excerpts. Now cut the page. You have a new poem. As many poems as you like (Burroughs qtd. in Jones 346, emphasis mine).

Unlike the ‘automatic writing’ of the Surrealists, which was meant to tap into the unconscious, Burroughs here suggests that language-use is already an automated process, which needs to be attended to differently in order to ‘see’ it again. As Burroughs contends, “Your inner space belongs to you. It is time to demand what is yours” (*Naked Scientology* 11).

And while Ballard compares Burroughs to “Virginia Woolf,” and takes up Ted Morgan’s idea that his literary “circle [which] included Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, and Allen Ginsberg” can be likened “to the Bloomsbury Group,” there are relevant distinctions here that go unremarked upon as well as certain continuities that remain unmapped out (“Hitman for the Apocalypse” 135). So, while modernism has been understood as subjective and nonrepresentational, Burroughs believes that cut-ups are a representation which is analogous to the functioning of the human mind: “consciousness is a cut-up” (*The Adding Machine* 61). Cut-ups are meant to defamiliarize the basic phenomenological experience that usually goes by naturalized and unnoticed, which means they are in important ways also analogous to the perceptible nature of reality: “Life is a cut-up” (*ibid.*). A “cut-up,” then, according to Burroughs’s working definition of the term, is:

actually closer to the facts of perception than, say, a sequential narrative. For example, you walk down the street. You see it and you put it on canvas. That's what they did first. But that's not how you really see it or remember it. It's more jumbled. There are the street signs and the vendors and the houses and people walking. You don't see them like a photograph. You look at diverse images (qtd. in Kramer 96).

The continuity here is that the modernists were interested in psychological realism, in which the inner processes of thought, feeling, and experience were rendered at the expense of another sort of representational realism. Indeed, Henri Bergson’s famous definition of the human as “something mechanical encrusted upon the living” cuts to the quick of how language itself has a mechanized, automatic quality to its use. This relates to what Jameson refers to as “the signifying chain,” which means while one may have a ‘train of thought’, so too they may have a ‘stream of consciousness.’ Henri Bergson’s quote—when juxtaposed with William James’s 1892 “stream of consciousness,” a psychological concept which would then become a literary technique heavily associated with

Modernist writers and their descendants,—creates an interesting contrast that also anticipates the interventions of Burroughs on the subject. James proposed a sort of psychological phenomenology:

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as ‘chain’ or ‘train’ do not describe it fitly. It is nothing jointed, it flows. A ‘river’ or a ‘stream’ are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter let us call it the stream of thought of consciousness, or of ‘subjective life’* (*Psychology* 239).

This links up with Richard White’s book, *The Organic Machine* (1995), which, of course, is about how an actual river has both mechanical (or predictable) and organic (or spontaneous) properties, in and of itself. It also articulates with Andy Clark’s book, *Natural-Born Cyborgs* (2003), where he argues we are not cyborgs in the “superficial sense of combining flesh and wires but in the more profound sense of being human-technology symbionts”; this includes technologies such as “speech and counting, written text and numerals, early printing, moveable typefaces and the printing press” (3). Burroughs reworks James’s theory of consciousness and the modernist technique of stream-of-consciousness with Brion Gysin’s cut-up technique (and his later addition, the fold-in method). In 1982, Burroughs spoke to John Walters, arguing that consciousness does indeed “appear to itself [as] chopped up in bits,” which is what cut-ups reproduce through their (dis)jointed juxtapositions:

these juxtapositions between what you’re thinking if you’re walking down the street and what you see, that is exactly what I was introducing. You see, life is a cut up. Every time you walk down the street or look out of the window *your consciousness is cut by random factors* and then you begin to realise that they are not so random, that this is saying something to you (<https://www.briongysin.com/cut-ups/>, emphasis mine).

In 1986, Burroughs came right out and said, “Consciousness is a cut-up...As soon as you walk down the street, or look out the window, turn a page, turn on the TV—your awareness is being cut...That sign in the shop window, that car passing by, the sound of the radio... Life is a cut-up” (*The Adding Machine* 61). In his “Screenwriting and the Potentials of Cinema” (1991), Burroughs

writes about his work as a more-or-less ‘realist’ undertaking, saying, “We were trying to expand the awareness of the audience by experimenting with the...medium. What we were trying to do was jar people into [a recognition or] an awareness by actually showing them mechanisms of perception that, of course, go on all the time” (79).

In a 1976 interview, Burroughs explained: "I think that writing is a transcription of a film. And so I've used a lot of film techniques" (qtd. in Baldwin 65). This "transcribing of a kind of film in the mind"—and the resulting tension between aesthetic and political purposes of his project—describes all of Burroughs's writing (ibid.). *Junky*'s author-surrogate, Bill Lee, says that his "first experience with junk" was like a "series of pictures passed, like watching a movie" (ibid.). There is a direct parallel between the altered states that Burroughs efforts to effect with his cut-up writing and the altered states that he pursued through the alternate means of drugs, ‘flicker,’ film, e-meters, tape-recorders, speech-scramblers, the dreamachine, shot-gun art, as well as a whole host of other equally spirited endeavors. As Douglas Baldwin points out,

The rapid, non-diegetically linked images that ‘Lee’ then ‘sees’ under the influence of his first shot of heroin subsequently describe the kind of cinematic montage we find in Burroughs's major fiction, where seemingly disparate scenes, images, and ultimately even individual words are thrown with what Burroughs has defined as ‘randomized montage’ against the reader's imagined narrative screen (65-66).

Burroughs also articulates the physiological aspect tacked on by the New Wave writers to amend what had previously been SF’s cognitively-based enterprise: “Yes, that is what we writers sell: experience...The Stendhal syndrome—physical effects of an art object” (87). Burroughs also talks about the quasi-hallucinatory synesthesia of language in a cut-up that illustrates as it also reads: “Images shift sense under the scissors smell images to sound sight to sound sound to kinesthetic. This is where Rimbaud was going with his color of vowels. And his ‘systematic derangement of the senses.’ The place of roescaline hallucination: seeing colors tasting sounds smelling forms”

(qtd. in Jones 347). In a notebook from 1953 when he was travelling in search of Yage, “without any evident context, Burroughs notes: ‘St. Perse. This is Yage poetry’ (41). This is Burroughs’ first recorded reference to St.-John Perse, pseudonym of...Alexis Léger” (*Everything Lost* xiii). Oliver Harris explains, “In the early 1960s Burroughs would refer to St.-Perse, together with Rimbaud, to identify the poetics of his cut-up experiments,” but the “earlier allusion...is particularly relevant [because of] Burroughs’ identification of a yagé poetics, which affirms creative correspondence across decades between the visionary drug and cut-up methods, linked by reference to St.-Perse” (*Everything Lost* xiii). This “systematic derangement of the senses” also expresses the aesthetic, affective, and physiological element reintroduced to SF (and science) by the New Wave writers and the New Age figures cited. Burroughs also argues, however, that what are otherwise: “Clear classical prose can be composed entirely of rearranged cut ups,” which shifts the practice away from its use only as an experimental writing technique (qtd. in Jones 347). Importantly, Burroughs sees cut-ups as having a sort of popular pedagogy to them. They are experimental not just in the sense of being avant-garde but also simply as “*something to do*: Not something to talk and argue about” (qtd. in Jones 346). The vast majority of people perhaps all readers of Burroughs read him to ‘aesthetically appreciate’ his work instead of actually undertaking the methodology that his work teaches, which shows a strange disconnect in the audience’s expectations that clashes with the overtly stated intentions of Burroughs himself. This also shows the way that Burroughs crosses the New Wave SF poetics (hyper-aesthetic) with other aspects of the New Age how-to manual (anti-aesthetic). Burroughs directs his readers to experiment *for themselves* and not take his word for it:

Greek philosophers assumed logically that an object twice as heavy as another object would fall twice as fast. It did not occur to them to push the two objects off the table and see how they fall. Cut the words and see how they fall...Word falling—Photo falling—Break through the grey room (qtd. in Jones 346; Towers Open Fire).

Ballard says, “In the past the scientific bias of s-f has been towards the physical sciences—rocketry, electronics, cybernetics—and the emphasis should switch to the biological sciences” (“Which Way to Inner Space?” 197). What this misses, however, are the intersections between electronics, cybernetics, and the biological sciences, which Burroughs for one was keenly attuned to isolating and integrating. Burroughs poses a question with a reparative bent, saying, “So, instead of directing attention to the brain waves that accompany conflict, why not direct attention towards the brain waves that accompany calm and relationship? ... It is time to get down to the bio electrics of the actual brain mechanism and tune conflict out”; he continues, “Let’s condition people on an assembly line to control brain waves and bodily processes. This could lead to complete mood control. Any trip you want without drugs” (*Naked Scientology* 11). What Burroughs refers to as “mood control” techniques create a utopian-leaning countermeasure to the “mind control” tactics that defined the earlier dystopic cultural imaginary of the Cold War era. Mood control, he suggests, is the way to circumvent the ‘mind control’ that has come to dominate our systems of thought and therefore to define our structures of feeling. Positive affect on a mass scale thus eclipses paranoid cognition through the “unimaginable extensions of awareness...now possible in terms of existing techniques” (11). Unlike outer space, Burroughs points out, inner space is not a property that can be fenced off once and for all; the closure is a “method...rather like mending an interminable fence that keeps falling down behind you”; he reiterates, “this brain wave control is not property. Alpha waves are the waves of sleep and dream, a relaxed calm state of mind. So we hold Alpha Festivals where 400,000 brains get together and emit alpha waves. Many other brain waves can be isolation and subjects trained to emit them. Any kind of wave you want. Find a wave you like and emit it” (11). He discusses these ideas in the context of the sixties counterculture, and imagines what else it might accomplish if taken to a new level of intensity with “drugs unknown to modern science”

and cybernetic applications of biofeedback devices, claiming,

The Woodstock Festival portends a new mass consciousness. This consciousness with the mass emission of brain waves can produce far reaching effects. Everywhere people pool their funds and buy an encephalographic unit. Tinkers make their own. Whole cities are dreamy and somnolent with alpha waves. Sex wave orgies sweep the world. You can feel the aura of an epilepsy fit for miles...There are pop festivals to rock and roll brain waves. Peace, love, and beauty waves engulf the cops. The president calls a nationwide alpha day. The ESP waves have been isolated. Mass telepathy breaks out. Any waves you like (11).

So, while Ballard argues that “what we need is not science fact but more science fiction,” Burroughs says, “experimentation and research carried out by workers in the field of electronics, virology, cybernetics, biology, and operant conditioning could result in revolutionary advances” (“Which Way to Inner Space?” 197; *Naked Scientology* 10). He suggests that “the astronauts of inner space,” the “anthropologists...and shamans,” the “mathematicians, computer programmers, biologists, and virologists,” the “students of language” and media theory, “those who have fought for freedom in the streets,” “experimental psychologists,” and “young people...anyone under the age of 35” need to work together to reexamine “old concepts like mind/body dualism” in order to achieve “cataclysmic...results” through “the mass application of...techniques now available” (*Naked Scientology* 10). And although to Burroughs, “The time has come for the line between literature and science, a purely arbitrary line, to be erased,” a claim that is somewhat distinct from the one Ballard makes regarding the New Wave of SF which relies on his reading of Burroughs in particular, in “The Fall of Art” (1989), Burroughs also claims that “[what] we call art... is magical in origin” (*Letters Vol. II* 429; *The Adding Machine* 61). Literature and science, art and magic, fact and fiction, and “dream and reality...meet and fuse” in the futurist folklore and materialist magic offered in this Burroughsian rendering of the New Wave and psychonaut movement (“Time, Memory, Inner Space” 200). Burroughs notes: “So these computer whizzes draw up an Identikit

of what [the] next pandemic will look like, and where it will come from. So books do exactly that—show us where present policies are taking us” (*Last Words* 177). Yet, for Ballard too, “we live inside an enormous novel” and “fiction is a branch of neurology” (“Introduction” *Crash*). Burroughs had

an analogous fascination with, and simultaneous suspicion of, the very verbal medium he uses to express his anxiety about alternate and competing technologies of discourse. For Burroughs, both visual and verbal narratives traditionally fail to mimic real processes of perception; they instead redefine how people ‘see.’ For Burroughs, this ‘redefining’ becomes a trope for how perception—individuals’ ‘narrative self-fashioning,’ as it were—is controlled by outside forces (qtd. in Baldwin 65).

Ballard argues that in New Wave SF, and specifically in Burroughs, “what appear to be the science fictional elements...in fact play a metaphorical role” (“Myth Maker of the Twentieth Century” 129). Hayles argues the opposite, also specifically referring to Burroughs, and generally describing the American New Wave, claiming, “the single most important device is the insistent pressure to take metaphors literally—or put another way, to erase the distinction between words and things...the pressure toward literalization can be seen in the narrative sections that use the conventions of science fiction to figure the invasion of the word as a physical operation” (214). Interestingly, Ballard and Hayles are talking about the same novel, *The Ticket That Exploded* (1972), which is one of Burroughs’s cut-up novels that explicitly invokes the language and experiments devised by Lilly and Hubbard. Burroughs indicates that “The word is bio-feedback indicating a feedback between an electronic device and psychophysiological events” (*Naked Scientology* 28). In “The Limits of Control” (1980), Burroughs explains that “words are still the principal instruments of control....No control machine so far devised can operate without words, and any control machine which attempts to do so relying entirely on external force or entirely on physical control of the mind will soon encounter the limits of control” (*The Adding Machine* 116).

His method requires you to “Cancel...all your other gimmicks of control” because “control can never be a means to any practical end...It can never be a means to anything but more control” (*Ticket* 104, 137). Burroughs asks, “Can we live without the other half [O.H.]?” because the “O.H. must always talk. O.H. is talk, was the original invasion—was ‘word,’ of course, so cut word out in slow withdrawal. It’s going to hurt and hurt bad” (*Last Words* 11). Ballard says that “Burroughs’s conclusion is that...ultimately the only choice is between living in one’s own nightmares or in other people’s, for those who control the system...merely impose their own fantasies on everyone else” (“Myth Maker of the Twentieth Century” 128). Burroughs, however, discusses his techniques as alternative methods of resistance, not only to externally-imposed nightmares but to internalized nightmares of one’s own making. In the final analysis, he more than suggests that the question of “who programs you” is one for which there are at least two answers:

You are a programmed tape recorder set to record and play back who programs you who decides what tapes play back in present time who plays back your old humiliations and defeats holding you in prerecorded present time You don’t have to listen to that sound you can program your own play back in present time study your associational patterns (165).

While Hayles describes Lilly’s work as “a posthuman strain of performance art,” another critic calls it an “*experimental performance science*,” which I argue are terms that could equally apply to Burroughs and Hubbard (Hayles 168; “Communication Out of Bounds” 19, emphasis in original). Pickering similarly calls these (es)strange(d) sorts of cybernetic experiments a form of “ontological theatre” or “ontology in action” (*The Cybernetic Brain* 82). He likewise describes them as “a *performative epistemology*” and cybernetics as “a *science of the performative brain*, in contrast to the more familiar cognitive version” (“History of Cybernetics” 10, emphasis mine). This embodied and relational model of the cybernetic brain lends itself further to what Pickering calls the “non-dualist coupling of the brain to the world” (5). So, while the first-generation

cyberneticians weren't denying the brain's "cognitive capacity," they were certainly flagging "the *performative excess* of the world in relation to our cognitive capacity" (10, emphasis in original).

As Pickering points out, which I reiterate in transitioning to a brief discussion of Lilly, Hubbard, and Burroughs as important historical antecedents to the New Wave and New Age counterculture,

I can't help thinking of Michel Foucault's idea of technologies of the self. In Foucault's own work, these are technologies that produce a distinctly human, self-controlled self—the kind of self that sets us apart from animals and things. Flicker, then, is [an example of] a different kind of nonmodern, non-Cartesian technology of self—a technology for *losing control* and going to unintended places, for *experiment* in a performative sense. Much of the literature in this area can be read as devoted to strange performances and the technologies of the self that elicit them ("History of Cybernetics" 5, emphasis in original).

Pickering says, "biofeedback is historically related to Grey Walter's EEG research, and originated as a technique for interfering with one's own brainwaves," which was "taken up in the 60s as a technique for achieving the same sort of transcendental inner states as meditation and psychedelic drugs, and performances of biofeedback music often entailed the achievement of such altered states by performers (individually or collectively) and the audience" (5). Like Lilly's "float tank" (and ketamine), Hubbard's "E-meter" (and auditing), and Burroughs's "tape-recorder" (and cut-ups), "this new sort of [biofeedback] music was directly performative as itself a technology of the self for achieving altered states and nonmodern subject-positions" (13). Thus, I argue that these new kinds of exploratory procedures, therapeutic routines, and writerly rituals as developed by my iconoclastic triad "[pre]figured not just as an interpretive resource for grasping altered states and strange performances, but as a [re]source of technologies of the non-modern and non-dualist self" ("Cyborg Spirituality" 353). Unlike Foucault's "*technologies of the self*," which Pickering says construct the modern subject as a uniquely "human, self-controlled self," these technologies cause "a sort of *decentering* of the self," which brings forth "a rather different non-modern ontology" ("History of Cybernetics" 5, emphasis in original; "Cyborg Spirituality" 349).

In Pickering's formulation, the cybernetic brain is that which is "immediately engaged in bodily performance and goings-on in the world; and...this performative perspective on the brain directly subverts Cartesian dualism" ("Cyborg Spirituality" 350). From this embodied perspective, "the cybernetic brain was not just performative but adaptive, understood as the organ that helps us get along in a world that can always surprise us" (350). If the "cognitive brain" was thought to be the "stable centre of will, calculation and planning," then the adaptive brain was "intimately caught up in the thick of things, continually reconfigured in a decentred dance of agency—which is, more or less, the Buddhist analysis of the self" (351). The cybernetic "modelling [of] the brain and the environment with identical machines, of course, further subverted Cartesian dualism, staging a vision of the brain and the world as structurally isomorphous," which "again provided an opening to the East" (351). Pickering speaks to the need for altered states in our modern madness, saying,

These elements—the analysis of the double bind; the idea of psychosis as an inner voyage; a Buddhist account of the self, of the workings of the double bind, and of the phenomenology of the trip—were central to the anti-psychiatry movement in Britain in the 1960s...at a place called Kingsley Hall in London in 1965. Established by R.D. Laing and his colleagues...Kingsley Hall was a commune in which psychiatrists and sufferers lived together on a par, with the former trying to help the latter in their inner voyages in any way they could, while expecting themselves to be reciprocally transformed in the process. Laing's analysis was that in modernity we are all profoundly mad, precisely in our disconnection from the world of inner experience, and he looked to both Eastern and Western mystical traditions for inspiration in making some sort of reconnection (352).¹⁵

The crucial insight, as expressed by one of the residents of Kingsley Hall, was: "We realized the

¹⁵ Bateson, who worked in Lilly's dolphin lab, participated in Laing's experiments at Kingsley Hall. Ballard's novel, *High-Rise* (1975), has a character named Dr. Robert Laing which appears to be a bit of a nod to R.D. Laing although his first name was Ronald. (Invert 'Dr.' to get 'Rd' Laing and/or invert the initials of 'Dr. Robert' to get 'R.D.' Laing). The novel is considered a work of psychogeography and bears some rather striking similarities to John Calhoun's "rat utopias" which he referred to as "high-rise apartments" in his building of "rat cities" that were overcrowded and led to what in social psychology is known as the "behavioral sink." Calhoun studied rats at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and his work has been used to justify and implement racist urban strategies such as red-lining and restrictive covenants. The experiments published in a 1962 paper were incredibly racist as was all of his rat research. See Theo Anthony's *Rat Film* (2016). Ballard's novel, in my view, is better read as a psychoanalytic allegory for inner space and the partitioning of psychic excess in (post)modernity. See Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1964).

importance of the body, of *the body-mind continuum*” (qtd. in “Cyborg Spirituality” 352, emphasis mine). Bateson’s “concept of psychosis as an ‘inner voyage,’ [...] from which the sufferer ‘comes back with insights different from those...who never embarked on such a voyage’” is another model of mental illness that tracks with the New Wave and New Age interest in altered states and the way other cultures have understood or approached nonnormative psychologies or persons. As Terence McKenna says, “The shaman not merely a sick man, or a madman; he is a madman who has healed himself, who is cured, and who must shamanize to remain cured” (*The Invisible Landscape* 65). Bateson also “compared the voyage to an initiation ceremony and a process of death and rebirth—a dissolution and reconstitution of the self” (“Cyborg Spirituality” 352). McKenna similarly says,

Although the particular motifs vary between cultures and even individuals, the general symbolism is clear: The novice shaman undergoes a symbolic death and resurrection, which is understood as a radical transformation...In short, the shaman is transformed from a profane into a sacred state of being. Not only has he effected his own cure through this mystical transmutation, and hence can cure others as well (*The Invisible Landscape* 65).¹⁶

All this is to remind us of “the straitened and impoverished conceptions of the self and the spirit that the modern West affords us, and that we act out in our daily lives, and of the complicity of the modern social and human sciences in this narrowing and constriction of thought and action” (“History of Cybernetics” 9). Indeed, Pickering is clear that “what is at stake is not simply ideas about the brain and the self. Distinct and specific projects and forms of life hang together with these ideas—different ways to live” (“History of Cybernetics” 6).

¹⁶ Oliver Harris says that “Ginsberg’s description...of Burroughs’ ‘Yage’ manuscript [from 1953]—specifically, the ‘Composite City’ vision [that ends “In Search of Yage”]—likewise recognised its affinity with ‘the anthropological-eastern deep psychic intensity of St. J-Perse’s poetry’”(qtd. in *Everything Lost: The Latin American Notebooks* xiv).

Antecedent Figures

john c. lilly:

In the province of the mind, what one believes to be true is true or becomes true, within certain limits to be found experientially and experimentally. These limits are further beliefs to be transcended. In the mind, there are no limits (Lilly, 1972: 8).

3 days in the tank could be the equivalent of 3 years of psychoanalysis (“Lilly Papers,” 1965: 33).

In a prep school paper from 1928, John C. Lilly asks, “How can the mind render itself sufficiently objective to study itself?” (*Deep Self* 67). A neurophysiologist, psychoanalyst, and physician, Lilly abandoned his more standard academic research from the 1950s to become a New Age guru in the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁷ In 1954, Lilly invented the isolation tank, a technology he formerly used in sensory deprivation experiments while he was studying the almost invariably negative effects of isolation for the U.S. military. In 1964, after spending nearly a decade running his own self-experiments in what he now called “the float tank,” Lilly started using psychedelics—LSD and ketamine—to augment his research and enhance his results. Lilly and his colleague Jay Talmadge Shurley “mapped out the basis of their approach in a 1960 paper, the aim of which, they wrote, was...to establish the physiological and psychological conditions that ‘would give the maximum of information form the subjective sphere’” and “develop a set of guidelines for using the tank as a mode of self-analysis and exploration” (qtd. in ““On modified human agents”” 94). He later published *Programming and Metaprogramming in the Human Biocomputer: A Manifesto for Inner Space* (1968), a mind-bending how-to manual for psychedelic

¹⁷ Lilly has been taken up in recent scholarship regarding his scientific impact on cybernetics (Burnett, 2016; Clarke, 2014; Langlitz, 2006; Shiga, 2013; Williams, 2019). His scholarly surge corresponds to a broader trend of looking at the connections between contemporary science and the counterculture. For more on this topic, see David Kaiser and Patrick McCray’s recent anthology, *Groovy Science: Knowledge, Innovation, and American Counterculture* (2016).

self-hacking, which he explained through dense computational metaphors saturated in cybernetic strangeness.¹⁸ If various “theories” were “analogous to computer metaprograms,” which were “stored programs” being run in the “huge computer” of the brain, then a technique he termed “*selfmetaprogramming*” might be able to modify its processing at the most basic and fundamental levels (92, emphasis in original).

Lilly anchors a set of countercultural practices, specifically drug use, which might otherwise drift off-course. As Ballard says, “It is that *inner* space-suit which is still needed, and it is up to science fiction to build it!” (“Which Way to Inner Space?” 198, emphasis in original). This idea of constructing an “inner space-suit” to free dive into reality has its psychonautic pairing in Lilly, an early pioneer of these black, watery realms. As Hayles says, “The experiments required subjects to enter a dark tank and to float, cut off from all sensory input, in water kept at body temperature” (227). The New Wave SF’s literary techniques of aesthetic immersion are correlated with Lilly’s psychonautic techniques for sensory submersion, which were technologically literalized in his “floatation chamber” or “float tank.” Much like Lilly, who compounded the experimental effects by coupling artificial deprivation and chemical inundation, my critical articulation looks at strategies that pair cognitive and noncognitive methods of consciousness

¹⁸ Nisi Shawl’s short story, “Good Boy” (2008), refers to John C. Lilly by name and in a series of epigraphs from *Programming and Metaprogramming*. The story uses Lilly’s “float tank” in the experiments undertaken by a mother-daughter pair with the last name “McKenna,” in another a countercultural allusion to the New Age Terence McKenna. The mother-daughter relationship runs parallel to that of *Parable*; the 15-year-old daughter of a cybernetic-psychonaut embarks on a mission to contact a spirit, Good Boy, to cure a “psychosomatic epidemic” at the behest of her mother. Lilly’s quoted intertexts as placed in the short story are comparable to those of Olamina’s Earthseed verses in *Parable*. The African belief system is bolstered by Lilly’s weird ‘tech’ but with the historicity of African “ancestor readings” from the African American tradition instead of in a white cult as in *Blindsight* (and in the history of American cults). Shawl cites “mid-Twentieth Century black musicians, specifically *Sun Ra*, *Parliament*, *Funkadelic*, and *Earth, Wind & Fire*” as a “notable space-travel mystique developed around their work.” Unlike with Olamina’s daughter, this is a scene of cross-cultural, intergenerational magical and scientific conversion that facilitates “talking to spirits.” Instead of “the drug...Lilly used [which Shawl cites as] LSD,” “Ivorene...opted for a tailored version of Narby’s Amazonian formula [Burroughs’s Yage?] in her early experiments” (143-180). Music, drugs, trance, spirits, ancestors, visions, altered states, “unusual therapy methods” using “the psychological approach” that the nonbelievers call “necromantic mumbo jumbo” make it a real trip. Ivory→Ivorene. | Ancestor→Ancestry reading. | Ancest-ory→Ance-story reading.

alteration, which involves estrangement and refamiliarization. Importantly, Lilly points out, “Feelings of awe, reverence, sacredness and certainty are also adaptable metaprograms, attachable to any model, not just the best fitting one,” which recenters affect as the target for which cognition is the technique (*Programming and Metaprogramming* 7). In the early 1950s, Lilly’s descriptions of his isolation tank experiences were “couched in psychoanalytic terms as a form of ego regression,” which resembles Ballard’s description of *The Drowned World* (1962), in that his characters “realize that the uterine sea around them, the dark womb of the ocean mother, is as much the graveyard of their own individuality as it is the source of their lives” (“On ‘modified human agents’: John Lilly and the paranoid style of American Neuroscience” 99; “Time, Memory, and Inner Space” 199). Lilly would fairly quickly drop this terminology and join up with the anti-psychiatry movement, which Ballard would also participate in with psychiatrist R.D. Laing in 1965 at Kingsley Hall in London. Lilly argued that “the psychoanalytic theory provided inadequate models for understanding the complexity of consciousness” and that “isolation experiences allowed the mind to connect to domains of reality that were not currently understood by, or did not fit with, contemporary scientific models” (“On ‘modified human agents’” 99).

Lilly extends Ballard’s commentary on “inner space,” observing that just “as one can travel inside one’s models inside one’s head, so can one travel outside or be the outside of one’s model of the universe, still inside one’s head” (*Programming and Metaprogramming* viii). By 1970, Lilly was on the fringe of the scientific community, but deeply centered within the counterculture. In another book, *The Center of the Cyclone: An Autobiography of Inner Space* (1972), Lilly talks about his first-time tripping in the float tank, and although he’d never felt anything like deprivation during the previous tank experiments, the LSD amplified his experience to such an extent that he realized how “literally one is *tuned in* to the cosmos” (51, emphasis mine). Andy Pickering argues,

the brain is the organ of a strange sense, unrecognised in the West, capable of accessing some other, nonhuman and intrinsically spiritual realm that one may as well call ‘universal mind.’ One finds this idea in [Ross] Ashby’s notebooks from the early 1930s. In the passage where he admits to himself that he should be a spiritualist, he sketches out precisely the idea of the brain as a sort of hypersensitive...radio receiver, uniquely open to signals in a spiritual aether... (“Brains, Selves, and Spirituality in the History of Cybernetics” 8).

The idea of being “tuned in” immediately recalls the more famous psychonaut and psychologist, Timothy Leary, who coined the countercultural slogan, “Turn on, tune in, drop out”; however, as I’ve suggested, Lilly’s work is better explained from the earlier tradition of estranging science, which is of course none other than the history of cybernetics.

The Doors of Perception (1954) represents another precursor to the New Wave, which links Aldous Huxley, an earlier Modernist writer who also wrote dystopian SF, to the psychonautic and cybernetic study of the mind’s relation to world. *Brave New World* (1932) is perhaps one of the clearest SF forerunners to the interests that would come to dominate New Wave SF, as it includes sleep-learning, Pavlovian conditioning, classical psychoanalysis, and a fictionalized drug “soma,” which means “body” in Greek, in its sociological extrapolation. While in *Brave New World*, itself an allusion to *The Tempest*, drugs are treated in a perhaps metaphorical and certainly paranoid manner, Huxley would later become a practitioner and proponent of psychonautic drug use. *The Doors of Perception*, itself an allusion to William Blake, outlines his theory of “the brain as a ‘reducing valve’” and in his essay, “Heaven and Hell” (1956), he discusses his use of mescaline as a way of “by-passing the brain valve and ego-filter” (qtd. in “History of Cybernetics” 9; “Heaven and Hell” 37). In Huxley, this reducing valve stems a flood of available stimuli, blocking sensory overflow as a strategy for survival. This safety valve rejects that which has not been evolutionarily coded as “directly functional” to interpret patterns of signals from what is otherwise coded as “noise” (qtd. in “History of Cybernetics” 9). Lilly explains it like this: “the human computer operates in such a way as to make signals out of noise and thus to create information out of random

energies where there was no signal”; drugs like Ketamine and LSD are amplifications that increase the mind’s internal “*white noise* (in the sense of randomly varying energy containing no signals)” (*Programming and Metaprogramming* 82, emphasis in original). So, the isolation tank’s sensory deprivation mechanism represents an inverse strategy, but to the same effect; it silences external noise/signals, which by default turns up “the noise level of the mind itself” (82). While Lilly was originally interested in programming behavior via external controls, he then became entranced with deprogramming thought via internal communications. As Lilly observes, the “major need that develops in the isolation experience is transactions with others, i.e., communication,” but crucially, this “can be temporarily satisfied by hallucinating” (“John Lilly, The Mind of the Dolphin, and Communication Out of Bounds” 8). Instead of a “pathology of communication,” Lilly’s report on “projection” said that it was “a sort of involuntary protective reflex, an affective-ideational immune response” (8). As Shaviro elucidates in his example of LSD, “for all its light-streaming brilliance,” phenomenal experience is “nonetheless one of dark phenomenology” (44). Perceptual processing, which is dramatized with LSD, is necessarily that which has been rendered “dark with excessive bright” (44). Yet, in the float tank, we see a reversal of input/output of stimuli sources; when immersed in the black, silent void, its flipside emerges in an alien alterity that renders internal processing bright with excessive dark. In Huxley’s formulation, the brain acts as a safety valve to shield the blinking inner “eye” from the blinding reality of the unfiltered world; however, in Lilly’s investigation, the brain adapts to the blanking unreality of the tank and opens the floodgates to protect the inner “I” from exposure to lack. In each scenario, the brain operates through a two-way sensory defense mechanism that can be flipped back-and-forth and turned upside down. Using a dialectic of doubling that inverts inside/outside, these cybernetic/psychonautic practices transform the self/system in an open circuit in order to turn cognition *inside- out* and perception *outside- in*.

I. ron hubbard:

Adventure is my guidon.
(Hubbard, 1943: 33)

Hubbard, in comparing “a clear” to “the contemporary norm,” explains: “The margin is wide and it would be difficult to exaggerate... He does mental computations...which a normal would do in a half an hour, in ten or fifteen seconds...He can do a swift study of anything...and the study would be the equivalent...of a year or two of training when he was ‘normal’” (*Dianetics*, 1950: 171).

L. Ron Hubbard was a pulp SF writer who left his former magazine career, in which he was regularly publishing in John W. Campbell’s *Astounding Science Fiction* in SF’s Golden Age, to become a New Age teacher turned predatory cult leader. Hubbard’s bestseller, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (1950), is a manual for self-help that prefigured the New Wave. In a journal entry from October 14, 1943, Hubbard reflects on his early writing as being about his “life and dreams and emotions and adventure”; an earlier 1927 entry says, “adventure,” as he well knows, “is in the heart, not in the view” toward “the horizon one never sees” (*Early Years of Adventure: Letters & Journals* 1, 11). In 1932, at the age of twenty-one, already as concerned with questions of psychology as he would become with theories of cosmology, he inquires, “how can we understand that outside us when we can barely realize that which goes on within?” (3). Then, in 1943, at the age of thirty-two, Hubbard locates himself as most interested in the exploration of inner space, testifying that his intent is to embark upon, “namely, the grandest adventure of all,” which is, of course, “into ‘that vast and hitherto unknown realm half an inch back of our foreheads’” (9). Hubbard conducted extensive research using “self-auditing” techniques, which he would debut in his book *Self Analysis* (1951), before Volney Mathison invented “the E-meter” in 1952 in order to augment Hubbard’s earlier practice of “auditing” as a therapy method. Hubbard refers to as the E-meter as the “electropsychometer” in a 1952 lecture recounting his collaboration

with Mathison. It measures galvanic skin-response with a needle that swings on a scale while the person being audited holds an electrical contact point; when one has processed the emotional reaction registered by the E-meter the needle “floats” (“Taped Lecture: How to Audit a Theta Line, Parts I and II”). In Mathison’s book, *Electropsychometry* (1954), he says that the idea for “the E-meter” prototype (or “pilot”) occurred to him in 1950 while listening to one of Hubbard’s lectures:

In 1950... I next attended a series of lectures being given by a very controversial figure, who several times emphasized that perhaps the major problem of psychotherapy was the difficulty of maintaining the communication of accurate or valid data from the patient to the therapist (Mathison 101).

He continues, saying, “it appeared to me that the psychogalvanometer showed most promise” as a way to bridge the divide between what Hubbard calls the “auditor” and the “preclear,” terms which correspond basically to the “therapist” and the “patient” (104).

The opening pages of *Dianetics* explain that “the conscious mind, in dianetics, is called by the somewhat more precise term of *analytical mind*”; whereas the “sub-mind is called the *reactive mind*,” and it “operates exclusively on physical pain and painful emotion” (xii-xiv, emphasis in original). According to Hubbard’s theory, “the entire physical pain and painful emotion of a lifetime whether the individual ‘knows’ about it or not, is contained, recorded, in the engram bank” (xiii). This accounts for the terminology of the new age therapy method, in which “the auditor, with precision methods, recovers data from the earliest ‘unconscious’ moments of the patient’s life, such ‘unconsciousness’ being understood to be caused by shock of pain, not mere unawareness”; “late areas of ‘unconsciousness’ are impenetrable until early ones are erased” (xv). “This is scientific fact”, Hubbard argues, “this is not a theory”, and further explicates: “engrams, then, being received in ‘unconsciousness’ cause a partial ‘unconsciousness’ to exist every time they are restimulated” (75). Much of scientology’s ‘tech’, the E-meter notwithstanding, is anchored

in the specific language or vocabulary developed by Hubbard surrounding “auditing,” the name for his specific mode of peer-to-peer therapy, which how one accounts for the “files” of the brain’s “memory banks” (3). So, by way of a definition, “*the engram* is a moment of ‘unconsciousness’ containing physical or painful emotion and all perceptions and is not available to the analytical mind as experience” and it is “the single source of aberrations and psycho-somatic ills” (39, emphasis in original). Auditing with the E-meter, a biofeedback device that measures emotional resistance, is meant to improve one’s patterns of thinking and behavior, as “*habit* is that stimulus-response reaction dictated by the reactive mind from the content of engrams” (39, emphasis in original). Hubbard intended auditing to treat psychological ills and their physical manifestations by refiling “reactive mind” engrams into the “analytical mind” for processing and deletion because in the reactive mind, “the engram is never ‘computed’” (Hubbard explains in a footnote, “the content of the engram is actually *shifted* rather than *removed*”) (145, 174, emphasis in original).

Unlike contemporary ideas about Scientology today, as seen in a variety of exposé documentaries, such as *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief* (2015), *Dianetics* reads as fairly reparative. The anti-Scientology media now focuses primarily on the group practices post-Hubbard, which, according to the testimonials, have become increasingly paranoid with a focus on punishing in-group members and harassing ex-group members. This is very much a departure from the recommendations given by the religion’s founder in *Dianetics*, in which he maintains the following reparative intervention into the dominant ideology regarding so-called :

Punishment actually and literally and emphatically does no good of any kind whatsoever but accomplishes quite the reverse, since it occasions a reactive revolt against the punishment source and is likely to cause not only a disintegration of the mind but a continual bedevilment of the punishment source. Man reacts to fight sources of pain. When he stops fighting them he is mentally broken and of little use to anyone, much less himself (145).

As Hubbard says in another context, “we’d rather have you dead than incapable” (qtd. in Parks et al). Poaching his varied materials from early computer science, classical psychoanalysis, basic economics, and military dialect, Hubbard’s homespun vernacular positions his practices as directly opposed to standard psychiatry practices of the time, saying, “dianetic therapy wakes [people] up” and “removes engrams”, whereas “hypnotism puts them to sleep” and “installs engrams” (*Dianetics* 201). Still, a brief excerpt of an auditing session shows how an “auditor” directs a “pre-clear” after locating a pain point, or an “engram,” involving his mother, which reads a lot like ego-regression, and the reactive mind is roughly equivalent to the Freudian unconscious (185-186). The basic code of conduct for the auditor is to “reduce as many early engrams as you can find...and when you seem to run out of material, you go later into life and try to find another emotional charge” (280). In *Dianetics*, Hubbard explains how a theory of a more equitable relation, one which differs from Freud’s in psychoanalysis and psychiatry, underlies his therapy technique of auditing,

[The auditor] is there to audit and only to audit. If he feels that he is called upon to be lordly to the patient, then the auditor had better change chair for couch because he has a case of authoritarianism coming into view. The word auditor is used, not ‘operator’ or ‘therapist,’ because it is a cooperative effort between the auditor and the patient (175).

So, auditing was meant to occur between two people, and not hierarchically, although this founding principle of *Dianetics* would change in the organizational structure of Scientology in that one has to go through a series of intensive courses to become an auditor, which installs a social hierarchy in what had originally been conceived as more of an anti-psychiatry, do-it-yourself model of self-led, peer-guided therapy.

Achieving a sort of gamification pre-games in the modern sense, *Dianetics* and Scientology can’t be reduced to some pyramid scheme because it also gave what people were seeking in a social formation and religious structure that attended to the needs of the individual in relation to a

new community. And, as Burroughs notes, “Mr. Hubbard says that Scientology is a game where everybody wins,” which sounds like a cooperative form of play based on the recruiting structure of Scientology; however, Burroughs disagrees, pointing out, “There are no games where everybody wins” (*RBSM:ER* 76). Expanding on this claim, Burroughs says, “That is what [the] revolution is about. End of game. New games? There are no new games from here to eternity. END OF THE WAR GAME (36). While many would disagree, the spirit of Hubbard’s project was very good, and although things would change from what was outlined in *Dianetics*, Scientology does represent one of the only successful, long-term, non-Christian cults from the second wave of New Religious Movements in the mid-twentieth century American context. In the beginning, Hubbard himself often said, “I’m not even clear” and that auditing was a continuous, life-long process, which meant one could ascend and descend on “the tone scale” at different times in one’s life (qtd. Parks et. al). The “next stage in human evolution” was supposed to be everyone on Earth being “clear” of their psychic and physical maladies through the voluntary practice of *Dianetics* and later membership in the Church of Scientology, which is a concept that resonates with “the ideas of an ‘evolutionary consciousness’ which one finds in important branches of New Age philosophy” (qtd. in Parks et. al; “History of Cybernetics” 8). In one of the “Technical Bulletins of Dianetics and Scientology Volume IV” (1965), Hubbard says something rather different than what appears in the teachings of Scientology as a matter of course, his notable exception to what is the general rule is: “A philosophy can only be a *route* to knowledge. It cannot be knowledge crammed down one’s throat. If one has a route, he can then find what is true for him. And that is Scientology” (emphasis in original 1). However, as Burroughs testifies, somewhat humorously in the context of the paper:

(When I suggested that the Reactive Mind must be located in the hypothalamus my suggestion fell on unresponsive ears. Mr. Hubbard is not interested in suggestions. He states flatly that he has never known any suggestion from a student to contain the slightest value)” (*Naked Scientology*, 1970: 16).

william s. burroughs:

Yes, for all of us in the Shakespeare Squadron, writing is just that: not an escape from reality, but an attempt to *change* reality, so [the] writer can escape the limits of reality (Burroughs, 1997: 16).

A tape recorder is an externalized section of the human nervous system. You can find out more about the nervous system and gain more control over your reaction by using a tape recorder than you could find out sitting twenty years in the lotus posture (*The Ticket That Exploded*, 1962: 80).

William S. Burroughs was an experimental postmodernist writer and founder of literary Beat movement. Burroughs's early autobiography, *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict* (1953), sets the countercultural scene and serves as an introduction to drug discourse in the American context. In "Hitman for the Apocalypse" (1991), Ballard, speaking of Burroughs, says, "More than in the case of almost any other writer, Burroughs's life merges seamlessly into his work...one constantly feels that Burroughs's fiction, however extreme, is a milder version of his life" (131). In another article, Ballard continues, saying, "Burroughs has always been regarded as a maverick, roaming the wild lands beyond the walls of respectability," which could alternately describe New Wave SF and is a rather fitting way of thinking about Lilly and Hubbard as well ("Sticking to his Guns" 134). And, as I've demonstrated in his countercultural contemporaries, "from an early age," Ballard says, Burroughs was already intent on taking "the first steps in the exploration of states of altered consciousness that was to become a secondary career" ("Hitman for the Apocalypse" 132). In his nonfiction memoir, *My Education: A Book of Dreams* (1995), Burroughs comments on the problem of where to locate the observer, which was so crucial to early cybernetics, in the context of not only his nonlinear cut-up writing, but now also of life itself, saying, "Should I tidy up, put things in a rational sequential order? To do so would involve a return to the untenable position of an omniscient observer in a timeless vacuum. But the observer is observing other data, associations flashing backward and forward" (16).

While Ballard jokes, riffing on SF critic Kingsley Amis's *New Maps of Hell* (1960), which Ballard says proved to be "totally wrong" in its predictions for the SF genre, "For anyone with the courage to follow Burroughs his letters are the perfect guidebook to hell," I argue that Burroughs's work is a far better guidebook *out* of hell ("New Means Worse" 189; "Sticking to his Guns" 134). In other words, if Burroughs provides a new map of hell, it is always with the sole intent of helping others find the exit. As Burroughs says in *The Wild Boys* (1971), "The way out is the way *through*" (91, emphasis mine). In *The Revised Boy Manual: An Electronic Revolution* (1970), Burroughs sources this citation, saying, "As Mr. Hubbard says, the way out is the way through" (39). Said a bit differently in the earlier "atrophied preface" of *Naked Lunch* (1959), which Burroughs notably places at the end of the novel, "the way OUT is the way IN" (191). Finally, this idea that Ballard articulates in relation to New Wave SF, which he sardonically imagines as not exactly charting new maps of hell but creating a sort of tourist's guidebook for the sights along the way, I revise slightly. There is a more sincerely reparative way in which Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert's *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1964) reiterates the notion of "inner space" and "guidebook[s] to hell," which I argue is more in line with American New Wave and New Age counterculture than Ballard's reading of Burroughs. The psychedelic how-to manual reads: "The teaching concerning the hell-visions is the same as before; recognize them to be your own thought-forms, relax, float downstream" (31).

The Revised Boy Scout Manual: An Electronic Revolution (1970) was written as a sequel to *The Ticket that Exploded* (1967), both of which were actually written in 1962. *Ticket* is a cut-up novel that explicates/illustrates the cut-up technique in its pages and even more explicitly in its afterword and redeploys many of Hubbard's terms from *Dianetics*; moreover, as Hayles points out, Burroughs references Lilly's experiments with the float tank in this text, which he later tried for

himself sometime “between 1969 and 1972” along with “Alan Ginsberg and Timothy Leary” (“On ‘modified human agents’” 95).¹⁹ The *RBSM:ER* also overtly contemplates Hubbard’s “theory of engrams” and makes frequent reference to him (67). Burroughs was a practicing Scientologist for the during the 1960s, so it is no coincidence that his work incorporates important aspects of Hubbard’s earlier thinking. By 1970, Burroughs had made a sharp break from the Church of Scientology, denouncing its conservatism and challenging Hubbard in a series of open letters to the editor published in newspapers and collected in *Naked Scientology* (1971). Describing his experiences with auditing and the e-meter, Burroughs says: “These film glimpses will occur in auditing. I don’t say you are remembering another life but you are remembering something...a number of scenes later used in *The Wild Boys* were remembered on the E-Meter. Later I was able to obtain the same results through self-auditing” (85). He continues, connecting Hubbard to cybernetics, which the name *Dianetics* also refers to, saying: “The E-Meter is among other things a reliable lie detector in expert hands...The E-Meter is also a biofeedback device...This may account for the valid pictures and films that do sometimes occur in auditing” (86).²⁰ Like Lilly’s idea of “the brain, the biocomputer, [as functioning like] a huge transmitter/receiver,” Burroughs says, “An artist must be open to the muse. The greater the artist, the more he is open to ‘cosmic currents’” (qtd. in McClen and Brown; *Last Words* 54). He writes, “I follow the channels opened by the rearrangement of the text. This is the most important function of the cut-up” (*The Job* 29).

¹⁹ In discussing Burroughs’s text, Hayles cites this section in direct relation to Lilly: “The narrator stated: ‘Word is an organism. The presence of the ‘Other Half’ a separate organism attached to your nervous system on an air line of words can now be demonstrated experimentally.’ The experiments to which the narrator alludes were performed by, among others, John Cunningham Lilly, who in the late 1950s and 1960s used isolation tanks to test the malleability of human perception. The narrator mentions that a common ‘hallucination’ of subjects in sense withdrawal was ‘the feeling of another body sprawled through the subject’s body at an angle’ (*TTE* p. 49)” (227).

²⁰ “Dianetics” is from “the Greek *dianoētikos* ‘relating to thought’ + -ics,” but is also a portmanteau of *dianoētikos* and cybernetics (*Oxford Language Dictionary*). In the *Dianetics and Scientology Technical Dictionary* (1975), Hubbard says that “The word *Dianetics* is coined from Greek *dia* meaning ‘through’ and *nous* meaning ‘mind’”; this definition fails to account for the onomastics, sound pairing, or cybernetics underlying the e-meter as a biofeedback device (115).

Although he has since come to be associated with and taken up by various cyberpunk subcultures, Burroughs is definitively New Wave in his style of transgressive fiction. And, I argue, as does Ballard, he is not only a progenitor but a leading writer of New Wave SF, albeit admittedly on “the serious fringe” of the genre (and of genre in general) (“Which Way to Inner Space?” 195). As with Lilly and Hubbard, Burroughs’s nonfiction is the most crucial in my archive, but as Ballard also notes, his fiction and nonfiction have very blurred lines. Burroughs popularized Brion Gysin’s 1959 “cut-up technique,” which they collaborated on in *Minutes to Go* (1960), and added his own version, “the fold-in technique”; he also made use of the tape-recorder as a prosthetic extension of the mind in his audiotape experiments (Jones 346). Burroughs had a reparative, utopian faith that new mass-marketed media and communications technologies which were already household items could be reappropriated as the means of altering consciousness. He also had a rightfully paranoid view of mass media and communications technologies as they were traditionally used as he saw them as amplifying the already deeply engrained programming inscribed in ideology and language. Burroughs used several strange devices, including Reich’s “orgone box,” Gysin’s “dreamachine,” Hubbard’s “e-meter,” and Lilly’s “float tank” (in addition to being a heavy lifelong drug user), and seriously promoted these devices as New Age methods of self-alteration and mind modification. Much of his work reads like it is part “terrorist manual” and part “utopian fantasy,” which is how Burroughs self-describes the project in the *RBSM:ER* (40).

Burroughs connects the New Wave to what can be understood as the new religious bent of New Age culture, saying, “I am a writer. A scribe. Also, a Priest—like all true scribes” (*Last Words* 158). He speaks of cut-ups as revelatory means of communicating with the dead and living world: “Shakespeare Rimbaud live in their words. Cut the word lines and you will hear their voices. Cut ups often come through as code messages with special meaning for the cutter” (qtd. in Jones 346).

Burroughs reendows the word and world with a mode of materialist magic and practical prophecy,

When you cut into the present the future leaks out. We know so much we don't consciously know we know. Now, how random is random? The operator on some level knew where he was coming in but couldn't make that knowledge consciously available. Cut ups put you in touch with what you know but do not know you know (*Break Through the Grey Room*).

In his final 1995 memoir, Burroughs advises, “Nobody but a fool wants to know what the secret of the universe is. Or thinks that he could understand it. One thing: It is not other there, dead, to be discovered—but out there *alive, to be created*” (*Last Words* 196, emphasis in original). In his 1995 “Introduction” to *Crash*, Ballard expresses a similar sentiment, saying, “The writer’s task is to invent the reality...[and] the one small node of reality left to us is inside our own heads” (3-5).

While Burroughs, as a ‘high postmodernist’ and as a writer of transgressive fiction, is often categorized as hyper-aesthetic, his methods, techniques, and orientation toward his own work is also anti-aesthetic and, just as importantly, anti-elitist. He explains by saying, “All writing is in fact cut ups. A collage of words read heard overhead. What else? Use of scissors renders the process explicit and subject to extension and variation” (qtd. in Jones 346). Burroughs takes this postmodernist sentiment further and separates himself from the Surrealists of the 1920s like Tristan Tzara and Andre Breton, affirming that, “Cut ups are for everyone. Any body can make cut ups. It is experimental in the sense of being *something to do*. Right here write now” (ibid.). Reiterating this egalitarian ethos, Burroughs asserts, “Poetry for everyone,” instructing his readers to, “Say it again: ‘Poetry is for everyone.’ Poetry is a place and it is free to all” (ibid.). Cut-ups work not only as a reflection and refraction of reality, but as a divinatory method. He continues, saying,

I’ve made many cut-ups and then later recognized that the cut-up referred to something that I read later in a newspaper or in a book, or something that happened... Perhaps events are pre-written and pre-recorded and when you cut word lines the future leaks out. I have seen enough examples to convince me that the cut-ups are a basic key to the nature and function of words (*The Job* 32).

chapter summaries: two and three

Each chapter is designed to facilitate a systematic investigation into a shared “sensibility” underlying a set of literary and cultural formations, aiming to determine the level of “coherence among the elements of [the] formation,” and to enumerate the ways that “various pieces of [the] formation (or an alliance)...make sense together,” tracing both the “sympathetic reinforcements” and “mutual antagonisms” within and amongst various formations, alliances, and articulations in American counterculture (Grossberg 73). Though a narrower and more textually based analysis than Grossberg might have envisioned, my reading accounts for the historical backdrop through its attention to important cultural antecedents. The dissertation examines “how particular cultural practices...are articulated together to construct an apparently new identity,” looking at more than just the formal or genre-specific elements of the texts (70). In other words, the question of how certain literary works can be meaningfully connected to “a historically and socially distributed mode of engagement with (or consumption of) particular practices,” unifies my line of inquiry (72). Where do these seemingly separate subcultures intersect insofar as their specific themes and behaviors “make sense together” (73)? One way to tease out this relationship, then, is to interrogate the way each formation interprets and prioritizes core values and beliefs to approach shared problems and mutual goals. Crucial to my inquiry into New Wave SF and American counterculture is their literary, theoretical, and practical treatment of the following: displaying of utopian desires within dystopian conditions, escaping through both positive and negative lines of flight, accepting the risks of experimental thought and behaviors, pursuing knowledge in and experience of altered states, and posing questions that are at once epistemological and ontological. Since all of these features destabilize societal norms, they each have potential for social, political, and perceptual subversion. So, the chapters identify the mutual supports and the strenuous tensions that emerge

when articulating New Wave SF and psychonautic practices as simultaneous, dynamic literary and cultural expressions of dreams and hopes, as well as anxieties and frustrations, within a specific, delimited historical place and across a seriated set of particular moments in historical time (57). The dissertation examines New Wave SF and the wider psychonaut movement as two distinct, yet interrelated formations of American counterculture which, I argue, first began to emerge in the 1950s (Lilly, Hubbard, and Burroughs), became dominant in the 1960s and even through the 1970s (Dick), and still remain residually into the 1980s and 1990s (Butler). Though these distinct cultural configurations differ in their approaches, I argue they're inherently connected to one another in their shared sensibilities, affective alliances, ideological investments, and utopian impulses. Furthermore, since meaning is heightened by contrast, analyzing their mutual association yields a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the attitude underlying each one. Isolating where these cultural articulations converge and diverge reveals the methods and results of each with increased specificity as relational phenomena. Similarly, while the discrepancies between New Wave SF and post-New Wave SF disclose some of the generic discontinuities in the waves of American SF, the commonalities catalogue the uneven developments which continue to flow across literature and culture in a longer historical arc than is typically rendered. Critical analysis that spans the textual and the extra-textual, the literary and the everyday, and the fictional and the real must acknowledge the methodological gulf that separates these disparate realms. Still, the popular aspect of SF shows that it's not solely an object of literary study as it also circulates more widely. Chapter one gave an extended gloss to cut-ups as the postmodern parallel to New Wave SF as sixties counterculture. Chapter two and three stretch the New Wave past the narrower period of the sixties into the seventies, eighties, and nineties to ask why certain psychonautic sensibilities continue to seep into the more contemporary literary productions in drug and cult practices that still speak to the present.

I juxtapose two literary texts in each of the following chapters—applying Eve Sedgwick’s “paranoid” and “reparative” frame—in order to explore a range of possible experiences with drugs and cults in a selection of SF stories which fictionalize their effects across a set of similar cultural formations (“Paranoid Reading” 130). Like Henry Jenkins, I adopt an anthropological approach in evaluating popular literacies and fan practices; the act of “sitting too close” is not simply a failure to “maintain critical distance,” because it also produces a “different mode of critique” (15). Similarly, the project focuses on the “thoroughly historical” demand that objects *do something*, which Sedgwick says is “distinctive” to our “historical place and moment,” which is “appropriately described in terms of pluralistic, free market-like forces within essentially secular societies” (“Pedagogy of Buddhism” 155, emphasis in original). The three chapters each represent “utopian gesture(s)” that go hand-in-hand with “practical displays of resistance,” and which zigzag across “popular culture, and daily life” (McKay 27; Grossberg 66). By using this sort of critical crosshatching, I argue, in SF critic Tom Moylan’s words, that my selection of literary and cultural ‘texts’ take on subversive qualities as “gestures of defiance and weapons of struggle” (*Demand the Impossible* 47). This seizes on the twin poles of New Wave SF which swings between the sense of immanence and apocalypse, or sways between the political “sense of promise and problem,” as it is engendered by a uniquely American relation to and redaction of history, ideology, and culture (47). Drugs and cults represent “desire that moves us sideways” that circulates through alternative economies of meaning, connection, and value: “one object might put another in reach, as we come into contact with different bodies and worlds” and this “contact involves following...different lines of connection, association, and...exchange” (Ahmed 563). For my dissertation project, then, phenomenology “offers a resource...insofar as [it] emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready to hand, and the

role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds” (544). Using this theoretical scaffold, I attend to “the significance of objects” as “orientation devices” and “disorientation device[s]” in order to contribute to a critical elaboration that tracks “alternate forms of world making” (551, 565). To conclude, “disorientation would not be a politics of the will, but an effect of how we do politics, which in turn is shaped by a prior matter—simply, how we live” (569). Or, as Alan Watts writes, to contextualize some of my appropriation and repurposing of queer theory,

I have always done things in my own way, which is at once the way that comes naturally to me, that is honest, sincere, genuine, and unforced; but also perverse, although you must remember that this word means *per* (through) *verse* (poetry), out-of-the-way and wayward, which is surely towards the way, and that to be queer—to ‘follow your own weird’—is wholeheartedly to accept your *karma*, or fate, or destiny, and thus to be odd in the service of God (*In My Own Way: An Autobiography 1915-1965* xiii, emphasis in original).

Queer theorist Sarah Ahmed describes “queer moments” through a “metaphor of tripping,” which could be repurposed and expanded to apply to my archive’s interest in psychedelics as a means of waking up from “the ether of the everyday” (Ahmed 556; Ahuja 377). I look at “desired objects” deemed deviant (or out of line) that take us in a different direction (Ahmed 551). Afterall, the concept of “orientation” is not “simply...spatial,” but “temporal,” and it means effectively and affectively “knowing what to do to get to this place or that” (554, 377). So, while the first chapter contextualized the emergence of New Wave SF as a literary formation and provided the relevant historical context of its relation to the American counterculture more broadly, the second and third chapters narrow their focus to look at specific literary texts that traffic in the codes and conventions of another extra-literary practice drawn from that counterculture. The first chapter looked at New Wave SF and paid special attention to cut-ups to show how language had entered the historical frame and was being used to generate altered states. The second and third chapters look at drugs and cults as rendered in literary texts to study the crossover of literary and cultural forms in history.

chapter 2: summary

Go deeper out...For three days, that's all...[She] lowered herself into the tank (Shawl, 2008: 145, 165).

Chapter Two articulates Philip K. Dick's New Wave SF in relation to the legacy of John C. Lilly to investigate the psychonautic drug culture that emerged with the New Wave during the 1960s and 1970s as a coherent formation. The chapter's relations are relatively direct, as Dick was a notorious drug user who wrote New Wave SF, and Lilly was a neuroscientist turned psychonaut who was active in the counterculture. Hayles connects Dick's literary work with Burroughs and Lilly through the history of cybernetics, and notes Burroughs's literary citation of and involvement in Lilly's experiments in the isolation tank; all three men were users and proponents of drugs (168). Lilly's early scientific career examined whether and to what extent behavior might be programmed and controlled, which he inverted in his rebirth as a pioneer of inner space who imagined the ways thought might be deprogrammed and freed. By changing the direction of analysis, he shifted ego dissolution from the target of study to its technique, so noncognitive operations were marked not for manipulation or elimination, but amplification. Lilly's reparative reversal recoded the isolation tank "not as a tool of cognitive breakdown and brainwashing," but rather as one that "could benefit the human mind" ("On modified human agents" 94). With this transformative turn-around, his dystopian fantasies reoriented toward the utopian conviction that his "float tanks," as opposed to the former term "isolation chambers," might foster "a new inner security on a deep and basic level" (Lilly qtd. in "On modified human agents" 94). Though it is commonplace to see New Wave SF as performing a positive function when compared to drug culture's more negative reputation, the pairing of Dick's New Wave SF with Lilly's New Age drug experiments reverses this assumption. Still, like Lilly, the texts also suggest experiential modes and experimental means of self-alteration. Hayles argues Dick's mid-sixties novels show the "progressively deeper penetration of cybernetic

technologies into the fabric of the world” (160). His concern “with epistemological questions and their relation to the cybernetic paradigm” is about where to place “the observer—in or out of the system being observed?” (24). Like first-order cyberneticians, “Dick is a system builder,” and so knows “the observer creates a system by drawing a distinction between inside and outside,” which is an arbitrary and artificial closure (188). Dick and Lilly share the “emphasis on reflexivity” found in “second-wave cybernetics”; however, Hayles says, they reverse the direction of closure, moving away from “bracketing ‘reality’” and toward “the creation of ever more inclusive systems” (189).

I position “The Electric Ant” (1969) and *A Scanner Darkly* (1977) as two prongs of a thought-experiment, which theorizes drugs as cultural phenomena with productive and destructive possibilities like other new technologies of consciousness. I interpret two of Dick’s drug narratives as ‘reparative’ and paranoid’ re-writings of drugs, and thus use a reparative lens in my reading of “The Electric Ant” to offset the more recognizably paranoid reading of *A Scanner Darkly*; still, I locate potentials for both readings in each of the works. Moreover, I trace Dick’s use of the word “ant” as a derogatory and recurrent motif in his world-building, wielded as an epithetical double-entendre that designates either the Android (“The Electric Ant”) or the Addict (*A Scanner Darkly*) or both. The android and the addict are marked by compulsion and automation, defined by a lack of freedom and loss of control located in the physical body. As Hayles says, “embodiment is encoded into language through metaphoric networks,” which are “strengthened rather than undercut by...the specificities of physically diverse and differentially marked bodies” (206). For this reason, these emblematic figures function as the ultimate symbols of false consciousness; however, the loss of control does not automatically equate to a lack of freedom, which is one of the paradoxes I tease out in the texts. In this way, each drug narrative participates in perpetuating and perplexing what Sedgwick terms “the propaganda of free will” (“Epidemics of the Will” 129).

While the android's 'operating program' and the addict's 'irreversible pathology' are ideologically coded as totalizing and deterministic, Dick's short story is an early, influential example of "self-hacking," a SF motif that would later come to be associated primarily with 1980s cyberpunk SF. By way of a sort of play that moves across allegorical and literal devices, Dick's figurative self-explorer (the addict) and literal self-hacker (the android) are turned inside-out with speculative realism (the android) and outside-in through psychological realism (the addict). I argue that both of these narratives prefigure the cyberpunk trope of self-hacking through their New Wave conceptual displacements, which rearticulate the spiritual and psychological through a screen of psychedelic and cybernetic slang. A close reading of the texts reveals metaphoric meanings hidden under the surface of the scientific language, which each use "weird and extreme scenarios" in order to literalize science fictional concepts while also aestheticizing real-world practices (Shaviro 24). As Hayles says, it's "no accident that recursive loops and reflexive strategies figure importantly in these [textual] transformations," which are New Wave in their particular sort of "cybernetic fusion of language and technology" (221). "The cross-currents" between the language of technology and technology of language that appear in the New Wave generally, and in Dick's SF specifically, "are considerably more complex than a one-way model of influence would allow" (21).

To provide "a fuller description of these feedback loops" that run between "technologies and perceptions," we should be "concentrating on a period when a new technology comes into being and is diffusing" (207). Using this methodology, "one should be able to triangulate between incorporation, inscription, and technological materiality" (207). Clarifying, she continues, "when people begin using their bodies in significantly different ways either because of technological innovations or other cultural shifts," these "changing experiences of embodiment bubble up into language, affecting the metaphoric networks at play within the culture" (206). I argue that the very

differently situated bodies of the addict and the android are equally instructive as a means of decoding the metaphoric networks which reticulate across Dick's science fiction. Discursive formulations and practical experiences change "how bodies move through space and time" as an effect of "interfaces between bodies and technologies" (27). In Dick's two narratives, drugs act as new "techniques of inscription" that "merge with incorporated practices" in a "cyborg configuration of explosive [or implosive] potential" (222). In Dick's fiction, Hayles argues that this boundary dispute of inside and outside is often "conflated...with how to determine whether a creature is android or human" (24). Hayles theorizes the "schizoid android" as a Dickian character type ("typically gendered female"); however, my examination of two characters (both gendered male) in Dick's later work (1969 and 1977), adds to her critical work on his early novels (1962 to 1966) (161). Gender aside, "schizoid androids" are "associated with unstable boundaries between self and world" (160). This "profound confusion of inside and outside" depicts 'androidism' as deficiency and 'schizophrenia' as excess, which Dick replicates and reverses in the drug practices of his android-addict from "The Electric Ant" and his addict-android from *A Scanner Darkly* (168). Realizing his relative deficiency, or "androidism," Dick's "organic robot" literalizes self-hacking to trigger a sort of schizophrenic excess or sensory overload (allegorizing drug-induced psychosis, which, eventually, results in a kind of system-processing death that ejects him from the system of automatized labor). Conversely, Dick's human addict winds up reducing himself to something like "androidism" or cognitive deficiency through recreational drug abuse, which literally severs his corpus collosum and turns him into an automaton (fictionalizing drug-induced psychosis, which results in a kind of social death that reabsorbs him into the system of automatized labor). In the story, 'androidism' becomes 'schizophrenia,' leading to a sort of 'freedom' for the 'organic robot'; in the novel, 'schizophrenia' becomes 'androidism' leading to a new 'enslavement' for the human addict.

To briefly historicize this chapter's attention to drugs, I repurpose some theoretical insights of queer theory to recontextualize the project of 'thinking drugs'; there are significant parallels in the stigmatizing of sex and drugs as non-normative forms of pleasure and embodiment. In *Junkie* (1953), Burroughs says, "Junk short-circuits sex," which suggests addiction must be considered in its own right (124). This theoretical decoupling is further supported by the 1985 introduction to *Queer*, originally written as a sequel to *Junkie*, in which Burroughs explicitly states that *Queer* represents him off junk, when his "sex drive [had] return[ed] in full force" (3). Subversive subcultures that center on 'deviant' forms sex and drugs are considered to be "*both* a physical and a moral disorder—a sign of weakness and the absence of will" (Rabinbach 40). Burroughs describes the political climate of the 1950s as resembling the "slow beginnings of a disease," in which "initial symptoms of nationwide hysteria were clear," even comparing drug law to "police-state legislation" caused by "paranoid obsession, like anti-Semitism under the Nazis" (*Junkie* 142). Drug negativity defines a cultural aversion toward illicit substances as "a dangerous, destructive, [and] negative force," which must be controlled in the individual and social body (Rubin 278). The drug fallacy of misplaced scale refers to the cultural inability to view other people's experimentation with different drugs as anything less than "cosmic threats" (279). These erroneous assumptions erect "a hierarchical system of...value," which organizes behavioral practices by their relative deviance from the norm (279). Populations engaging in stigmatized drug use are "subjected to a presumption of mental illness, disreputability, [and] criminality" (279). The "denial of benign variation" with respect to drug preferences ignores the fact that some people 'get off,' so to speak, on different drugs, and these variations need not be laden with social meaning (283). This chapter thus contributes to the development of an "anthropological understanding of different [drug] cultures"; Ballard refers to SF as "spreading across the world like a cancer. A benign and

tolerant cancer, like the culture of beaches,” which is an analytic that also applies, in my reading, to drug cultures (Rubin 284; “Fictions of Every Kind” 231). It is no coincidence that discourses analyzing the politics of sex are so easily transposed onto the politics of drugs, as they each emerge from the same historical matrix. Dated by Michel Foucault as beginning in 1870, this period valorized efficiency, productivity, and industriousness to eliminate “useless expenditure” and “wasted energy” at the level of the individual and social body (*History of Sexuality* 114). By the logic of productivist discourse, deviant sexual behaviors and illicit drug practices are pathologized as waste and excess, or forms of non-productive expenditure. At stake in the comparison of these twin cultural imaginaries are convergent regulatory regimes, which are invested in policing and/or pathologizing non-normative forms of embodiment and pleasure. As Sedgwick says of Foucault’s work on the imagined origins of the homosexual, and which I extend to my work on the imagined origins of addict, there “currently exists no [discursive] framework...not already structured by an implicit...project or fantasy of eradicating [the very] identity” that the discourse ostensibly seeks to elucidate, but which it actually acts to interpellate (*Epistemology of the Closet* 41).

Intellectual labor is necessary to create a “constructivist alternative” to current moral and medical discourses, which, like Gayle Rubin’s “system[s] of erotic stigma,” inform thinking about drugs based in notions of “sin, disease, neurosis, pathology, [and] decadence” (277). Sedgwick says any “biobased explanation for deviant behavior” is “invariably couched” in terms of “excess,” “deficiency,” or “imbalance,” which has throughlines with the “schizoid android” in Dick’s SF (*Epistemology* 42). Our contemporary understandings of identity derive from a “relatively modern institutional complex” that constructs “new kinds of...individuals...stratified by the operation of an ideological and social hierarchy” (Rubin 276). In the “taxonomic reframing of a drug user as an addict,” the subject loses self-determination and becomes a victim of false consciousness, which

warrants the intervention of ideological and/or repressive state apparatuses, whose goal is to reprogram the individual as a functioning unit of production that surveilles itself (*Epistemology* 129). This is very much in line with what Dick thematizes in “The Electric Ant,” and to an even greater extent, in *Scanner*. To combat these tendencies that foreclose possibilities in ‘thinking drugs,’ the chapter adopts an “ethnographic attitude” toward drug culture(s) to open a space for pleasure without pathology, identity without determinism, addiction without essentialism, and politics without prohibition (Ang qtd. in Jenkins 286). I emphasize the redemptive aspects of drug culture which cannot be categorized as entirely destructive, or to narrow the claim slightly, I focus on creative destruction as a way of clearing ground to allow for something new to emerge. I perform a ‘reparative’ reading of drug practices, which are more often dismissed in the ‘paranoid’ reading as being visibly shortsighted, lacking socio-political efficacy, or epitomizing unethical hedonism without slipping into the naïve celebratory mode that fails to register their negative and at times dangerous effects. Although surely these critiques are to some extent valid, I argue that there are other cognitive and affective dimensions worth lingering over in these countercultural practices and their subcultural communities. Counter intuitively, I see the reckless abandon of drug use and meticulous design of SF as complementary not contradictory. The practical and political reach of each formation, I suggest, is made clearer through careful analysis of the drug practices as rendered in the New Wave SF examined. Said again, there are clearly risks involved, as the narratives deal with deadly serious issues like imprisonment, insanity, addiction, and overdose, but what, if any, are the rewards, including insights gleaned, escapes attempted, limits stretched, rules broken, and realities tested? To use a phrase coined by Timothy Leary, how might we widen our “reality tunnel” without damaging its structural integrity to the point at which it collapses (*Neuropolitique* 93)?

chapter 3: summary

Dreams run through my skin and veins, coloring all that lies
beneath. (Acker, 1993: 133)

Chapter Three articulates Octavia E. Butler's post-New Wave SF parables in relation to the legacy of L. Ron Hubbard to investigate the cult culture that emerged alongside New Wave SF during the 1960s and 1970s as a less coherent formation. The third chapter's argument draws out a set of important relations that have gone for the most part unremarked. Octavia E. Butler is more contemporary, often termed post-New Wave; still, Butler was certainly involved with the literary movement, as Harlan Ellison, a New Wave author and editor, discovered her work. I reposition *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998) alongside an unpublished work, *Blindsight* (1980-1987), as part of a two-pronged thought-experiment which theorizes cults as cultural phenomena with constructive and destructive possibilities. The *Parable* books follow a black female cult leader as she tries to launch a New Religious Movement (NRM). Earthseed, the religion in *Parable*, I suggest, should be read not only as a contemporary cult, but as a social mode of consciousness alteration. In interviews, Butler repeatedly cites "a New Age audience" as those who would be interested in the *Parable* books, which she also refers to as her "cult novels" (qtd. in Potts 333; 335). In the Huntington Archive of Butler's unpublished work, there are notes, drafts, and manuscripts of *Blindsight*, which center on a white male cult leader as he also tries to establish his own NRM. Lauren, the black female cult leader in *Parable*, thus forms a counterpart to Aaron, the white male cult leader in *Blindsight*. Marginal notes in *Blindsight* directly and indirectly refer to Hubbard, and Aaron's 'powers,' specifically "ancestry readings," resemble Hubbard's auditing techniques. Butler explains that Lauren's 'power' is more like a "delusion that she cannot shake," because "it's kind of biologically programmed into her," which I suggest might be usefully applied to both cult leaders as well as to thinking about the dissertation's attention to programming and

reprogramming (qtd. in Potts 335). The mind-sharing ‘power’ in *Blindsight* is “psychometry,” or telepathy-through-touch, which forms a conceptual chiasmus to “hyperempathy,” or empathy-through-sight, in *Parable*. I perform a fairly standard ‘paranoid’ reading of *Blindsight* but employ a tentatively ‘reparative’ lens to look at possibilities within and across the two parts of the *Parable* books, precisely because the first part of the duology sets to work at realizing a bottom-up utopia, albeit in categorically dystopic conditions. The third chapter will argue that a close reading of *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*—in dialogue with relevant unpublished works, like *Parable of the Trickster* and *Blindsight*—reveals a New Wave stylistic and thematic sensibility which challenges what has become the critical commonsense on Butler’s ‘cult’ novels as plainly prophetic or political instead of aesthetically and poetically dense and in need of literary decoding.

Chapter three looks at how Butler continues and develops New Wave preoccupations and fulfills them in surprising and largely unrecognized ways. The focus on cults in both *Parable* and *Blindsight* flags these works as decidedly New Wave, not to mention New Age. As J.G. Ballard says in, “Back to the Heady Future” (1993), “there appear to be fewer millenarian cults at present than...twenty years ago in the heyday of the Moonies and the Maharishi” (192). He continues to say that he misses “the large dreams, the heady, transcendental fantasies” and wonders if perhaps “the first installment of a future...has forgotten to materialize” (192). Published the same year as *Parable of the Sower* (1993), I suggest that Butler’s novel may have been written to fill this void at the heart of what was a burgeoning movement of religious cults and alternative spiritualities. While Earthseed’s destiny is to “take root among the stars,” and so seems to retain some of the utopianism of the Space Age, I argue that since this is part of a religious text which invokes biblical parables, it needs to be read as a parable for inner space, or with renewed interest in metaphysics, instead of astrophysics (*Parable of the Talents* 249). If, as Ballard laments, “science fiction has

foreseen every future that the human race can conceivably have in store for itself,” and “the furthest future is colonized,” then the battle is one that must be fought over inner space (“Back to the Heady Future” 193). And if, as he claims, “we appear to have turned our backs on the future,” or worse, “we have already dreamed our dream of the future,” then Butler’s New Wave SF might help remind us of dreams that have “forgotten to materialize” (192). As Ballard argues, “what we need is not more science fact but more science fiction,” “constructing fresh symbols and languages where the old have ceased to be valid” (“Which Way to Inner Space?” 197). Religious scholar Keegan Osinski argues “the brand newness of Earthseed allows for the creative shaping of rituals that could meet the specific needs of the traumatized community,” and like Ballard claims of the New Wave, “using their own [religious] symbols, language, and context” where the old have ceased to be valid creates a “more effective therapeutic ritual” (110). The language here that moves from the terms of religion to therapy should recall Hubbard’s project of *Dianetics* as practical self-help and also the shift to what in Scientology became a mystical religion. In Ballard’s short story, “The Terminal Beach” (1964), we are told almost immediately “the island is a state of mind,” which is one of the signature moves of the New Wave (3). In a 1944 journal entry, Hubbard presages the formal tension of this relative generic outlier of science fiction and mainstream literature, saying,

Adventuring is a state of mind. If you adventure through life you have a good chance to be a success on paper. Adventuring doesn't mean globe-trotting, exactly, and it doesn't mean great deeds. Adventuring is like art. You have to live it to make it real (L. Ron Hubbard's Journal, January 6, 1944).

This seemingly paradoxical quotation delineates creative writing’s dual status as a ‘real fantasy,’ or as in Immanuel Kant’s third critique *On Reason*, aesthetics is not a type of knowledge per se, but an “experience or sensibility.” Though Hubbard’s work is denigrated by Ballard, who refers (with aesthetic disgust that rivals Kingsley Amis’s) to “the America of the *Reader’s Digest*” and to

“popular newspaper sensations such as Dianetics” as the antithesis of the New Wave, his religious writing did endeavor “to place some kind of metaphysical and philosophical framework around man’s place in the universe,” a task that Ballard claims has now been “more or less abandoned by the mainstream novel” (“The Cosmic Cabaret” 204). Similarly, the protagonist cult leader of Earthseed attempts to draft a religious and theoretical belief system through Butler’s articulation of Christianity with Socratic and pre-Socratic philosophy alongside what Amis has referred to as “oriental religions,” such as Tibetan Buddhism and Taoism, which were popularized in the West during the sixties counterculture (qtd. in “New Means Worse” 190). As Bankole says when he is first introduced to Earthseed: “It sounds like some combination of Buddhism, existentialism, Sufism, and I don’t know what else” (*Parable of the Sower* 260). The tenet of change as the only constant is also a fairly overt re-uptake of Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic philosopher, and the verse, “Earthseed / Cast on new ground / Must first perceive / That it knows nothing” recasts Socrates’ axiom, “The only thing I know is that I know nothing” (179). As eclectic and synthetic, if less verbose, than Hubbard, Lauren Olamina likewise claims to have ‘found’ her religion through her own personal life and private research, saying:

I’ve never *felt* that it was anything other than real: discovery rather than invention, exploration rather than creation...All I do is observe and take notes, trying to put things down in ways that are as powerful, as simple, as direct as I *feel* them (78, emphasis mine).

As Hubbard says in his introductory essay on “Dianetics” (1950), “Life is energy of some sort. The purpose seems to involve energy. We are being heuristic...If this postulate doesn’t work, we’ll dream up another one and postulate and postulate until something does work” (50). Lauren also theorizes “a truth,” which is “Every living thing, every bit of matter, all the energy in the universe changes in some way” (*Sower* 216). The chapter looks at how cults craft what Henry Jenkins calls “a poached culture, a nomadic culture, [which] is also a patchwork culture, an impure culture,

where much that is taken in remains semi-digested” (283). Like Dianetics and Scientology, noted above as a sort of generic slippage that re-imagines religion as a sort of therapy when historically that hasn’t been the case, the Earthseed of the *Parable* books at times reads “more like a self-help philosophy; sometimes it becomes a genuinely mystical, transcendent religion” (Canavan 146).

The “zone” of “inner space” is “the internal landscape of tomorrow that is a transmuted image of the past” where “internal and external reality meet and fuse” (“Time, Memory, and Inner Space” 200). So, too, I argue, Butler’s duology must be read with “an awareness that the landscapes and themes are reflections of some interior reality within our minds,” just as the biblical parables are allegories, as well as illustrations (201). Written in a Christian concentration camp, Lauren Oya Olamina’s journal reads, “On Sundays when we’re fortunate enough to be let alone early, I take out paper and pencil and use my bible as a desk” (*Talents* 202). In the quote, the interned leader of the Earthseed cult satirizes and literalizes the ‘use-value’ of the Bible as a sort of writing aid; however, Butler’s titles show that the Bible is taken seriously as something to be used not just as a desk, but as the foundation of her own SF parables. Earthseed, I argue, can be read as a practical mode of consciousness alteration: Earthseed *works*; it *does* something, and not only for its leader, but for its followers. Lauren Olamina says as much when she observes, “some of these dissatisfied people are finding what they want and need in Earthseed” (392-393). As Sedgwick says in the context of Western popular culture, including how-to books, New Age crazes, and do-it-yourself trends common to the self-help genre: “The question Is this (account) accurate or misleading? May give way for these readers to the question *Will this (practice) work or won’t it?*” (“Pedagogy of Buddhism” 155). Whether or not the practices in *Blindsight* that derive from Aaron’s ‘powers’ *work* is more of an open question, which, as the novel was never finished, cannot be definitively answered. A powerfully reparative writer, SF critic Gerry Canavan speculates that Butler couldn’t

quite bring herself to write a truly paranoid ending to *Blindsight*; however, I move to suggest that Butler had more ambivalence as to the reparative and paranoid potentials in her two published cult novels. So, while Butler is less concerned with deprogramming (and critiques the top-down imposition of it in the second novel), she is deeply invested in reprogramming, and, I argue, believes in what William James described as a “living option,” which “appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed” (“The Will To Believe” 199). As Larkin says, “Everybody needs to be part of something,” they need to believe they are a part of something that’s real (*Talents* 378).

Earthseed’s verses are at its heart the attempt to sound a vision of the future that moves in two alternative yet overlapping directions; past and present realities converge to shape this near future, which bends back into the space of the present world. To James, the working definition of reality “means simply [a] relation to our emotional and active life...[so] whatever excites and stimulates our interest is real” (*The Principles of Psychology* 924). Butler’s religious work taps into what Stuart Hall describes as the “continuing force” of cultural formations that “have a prehistory long predating that of our rational systems” to “directly engage with or transform the popular” (“On postmodernism and articulation” 142). As Butler has said in respect to the religious question in SF, “It seems that religion has kept us focused and helped us to do any number of very difficult things...I’m not saying it’s a force for good—it’s just a force. So why not use it?” (Butler qtd. in Canavan 127). Earthseed represents “a more optimistic intervention in[to] the world than [Butler’s previous] stories had allowed, almost ‘weaponizing’ religion as a tool for improving lives rather than making them worse” (Canavan 129). SF appears as the vehicle for this cultural and religious project of ‘shaping God’ precisely because “nothing can become popular which does not negotiate the experiences, the codes, etc., of the popular masses” (“On postmodernism” 140). In reparative terms, “the theory of articulation asks how an ideology discovers its subject” and “how

an ideology empowers people,” which is a fitting description of Butler’s research and writing on cults (142). By meticulously envisioning a way that specific “ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse,” Butler opens up opportunities for *moving* differently across the American inner and outer landscape(s) of nation, religion, community, and kinship (142). Butler’s *Parable* books negotiate the fact that one “can’t create a popular political movement...without getting into the religious question” because people “have been ‘language’d’ by the discourse of popular religion” (143). Subjects have *used* “religion to construct some kind of narrative, however impoverished and impure, to connect the past and the present: where they came from with where they are and where they are going to, and why they are here” (143). Without this type of cultural map of the living territory, there is little room or reason for any sort of intentional movement except as ushered through the already existing maze of interior corridors and mess of exterior causeways. The third chapter differs from the more reparative renderings of altered states in the dissertation because the pleasure component of “hyperempathy” is played down in the novels, whereas the pain component is not; still, there is a capacity for both aspects in theory. *Blindsight* has more clear uses of altered states as “psychometry” and “ancestor readings” allow Aaron to travel on genetic time-tracks by means of trance or “reverie,” to use Scientology’s term, and practice “faith-healing.” In *Parable*, I position *religion as a way of reading* as well as of writing that engenders Pickering’s “ontological opening” and/or Bateson’s “epistemological shift.” I suggest a more overt tie between hyperempathy and the religious verses she writes which is not foregrounded in the novel but which is nevertheless a sort of embodied madness that finds an outlet in her mode of ritualized writing. I also suggest that the *Parable* books offer something more like ‘psychopunk,’ keeping the ‘psycho’ from the sixties psychonaut, and the connotations of ‘psycho’ as in the insane, while adding ‘punk’ to retain the eighties cyberpunk in a new spiritual survivalism.

Chapter Two

Drugs

the gist or gestalt

Literally each of us is tuned in to the cosmos.
(Lilly, 1972: 34)

Our flight must be not only to the stars but into the nature
of our own beings.

(Dick, 1972: 189)

This chapter uses Philip K. Dick’s “The Electric Ant”(1969) and *A Scanner Darkly* (1977) as fictional models, each of which represents a carefully-built cybernetic system that works to test the limits of literary concepts of the self and reality. I argue that the signifying chain of linguistic, scientific, and psychophysiological formulations familiar to traditional SF, Modernist literature, and postmodernist fiction undergoes a series of complex conversions in the model systems built by Dick to theorize ‘drugs’ as new technologies of consciousness with ambivalent potentials. Furthermore, I argue that New Wave SF and psychonautic drug practices tend toward affective encounters with aesthetic estrangement in order to “probe this darkness,” which we *sense* but cannot *see* (Shaviro 44).²¹ It is a matter of *tuning* our instruments *in* to a wider field of semiotic communications, which involves an enhanced *sensitivity* to the processes of meaning-making both from affective-aesthetic and cognitive-conceptual “channels” in our embodied “equipment” (“Cyborg Spirituality” 349; *Programming and Metaprogramming* 23). The aesthetic and affective levels of subjective experience, from artistic encounter to habitual practice, brush up against the unknown, and point to that which lies beyond cognitive thresholds, whether above or below, on the outer edge and at the inner limit of “direct, conscious perception” (Shaviro 38). These dual

²¹ In *East of Eden* (1952), John Steinbeck writes: “And who in his mind has not probed the black water?” (116).

articulations are structurally related through inverted parallelism, which is textually transected in “The Electric Ant” and *A Scanner Darkly* when put in conversation with drug nonfiction by Lilly and Burroughs, respectively. With exploratory probes launched from two distinct sites, I argue that the New Wave SF attempts to *feel forward* and *think backward*. As Dick states in no uncertain terms, “One does not have to depend on hallucinations; one can unhinge oneself by many other roads” (“Quest for Reality” 174). Shaviro argues, “fictions and fabulations can provide us with a sort of *feed forward*...of those mental processes that are not available to introspection” (16).²² According to Grossberg, the context of popular culture resembles a “constantly changing kaleidoscope of cultural practices and daily life” (41). This could perhaps be likened to Benjamin’s idea of “kaleidoscopic consciousness” which he coined in talking about the alienating or estranging effects of drugs in *On Hashish*. It would explain what Hassan means by postmodernism as a sort of “20th Century gnosis” (33). In this postmodern milieu, described as “intertextuality gone mad,” the critic must tread carefully in order to “construct the appropriate intertextual links,” because “context is never a stable object of study” (Grossberg 41, 55).

Lilly even developed his own vocabulary for talking about the distancing effects of drugs, “alternity,” similar to Suvin’s theory of SF as estrangement. Lilly’s notion of “alternity” is defined by him as a state of consciousness in which one can look in any direction and “see a certain future and then right over here another future and on and on,” is important for theorizes these two cultural formations as performing a parallel function (“Alternity and Beyond” 11).²³ This is not a “higher”

²² Similarly, Metzinger cites “recurrent connections as a functional basis for consciousness” of “almost continuous feedback-loops from higher to lower areas” that “create an ongoing cycle, a circular nested flow of information,” which is “dynamically mapped back to what is coming in right now” (31). Burroughs termed this a sort of “nowness” in which consciousness appears in “7-second loops” (*The Western Lands* 7). Shaviro’s “*feed forward*” refers to the *flip side* of feedback in the set of embodied processes that Metzinger describes as “feedforward-feedback cycles” (31).

²³ Lilly’s description of “alternity” is, at least visually, something like an infinity mirror which corresponds to one of the perceptual effects of his drug of choice, ketamine. At high enough doses, the drug creates an intense dissociation during which one’s self-image appears to be deeply embedded within one’s own mind with external reality extending farther and farther into the infinite distance in an endless repetition of the same image that grows smaller and smaller.

state of consciousness, according to Lilly, because “in outer space there is no up and down”; still, it discloses an aspect of reality that normally remains pre- or non- cognitive, which is the fact that “we sit in alternity all the time” (14, 11). Lilly’s concept, then, of *alternity*—a play on *alterity*, *alternative*, and *eternity*—thus mirrors Suvin’s concept of estrangement in important ways, namely in a displacement of the everyday into the realm of the fantastic, and the fantastic into the everyday, which allows for a dialectical engagement with other speculative worlds while simultaneously transfiguring one’s own. A parallel between aesthetic and chemical consumption, used to achieve cognitive and noncognitive estrangement, forms one of the theoretical nodes through which New Wave SF and drug culture approach a shared problem. New Wave SF and psychonaut drug culture prioritize sensory immersion over critical distance, which expresses “the structural-functional *dominant* of the text or period” as “speculative,” in their pursuit of escapist pleasure and reorienting estrangement (McHale 244, emphasis in original). So, while Suvin argues that the escape of SF is not an escape from reality per se, but rather a line of flight that secures “a better vantage point from which to comprehend...[an] alternative timestream,” I expand and revise this argument by applying it to drug culture (84). Lilly’s *alternity* suggests what Shaviro terms “speculative flights” to what Suvin calls “alternat[e] timestreams”; Dick’s SF also contains adjustments to cognitive understandings of time. And if drug culture does not, like Suvin’s definition of SF, depict an alternate cognitively affirmed social reality, it does present an affectively affirmative individual reality. The “specific modality” of SF is “a feedback oscillation that moves [from the]...norm of reality to the narratively actualized novum...now back...to the author’s reality...to see it afresh from a new perspective” (Suvin 71). Analogously, the specific modality of drug culture works in “dialectic of intoxication” from the user’s norm of reality to the synthetically manufactured unreality and back, which has the real effect of shifting viewpoints that provokes a confrontation

between these two worlds (*On Hashish* ix). Benjamin also theorizes in the drug experiments what he described as a “transformation of reason” which alters cognition: “Thinking is sensualized” (ix).

The philosophical immersion that intoxicants afforded [Benjamin was] not the Symbolist derangement of the senses, then, but [a] transformation of reason. Which is to say: [...] in the traditional logic of noncontradiction and the traditional principle of identity (ix).

And while Dick argues, the “unshared world that we call ‘hallucinatory’ is destructive because of the social results,” the psychonautic counterculture as represented by Lilly shows that this is not always the case (“Quest for Reality” 173). Although more paranoid than much of Dick’s drug writing, he lists the possible effects of drugs as: “alienation, isolation, a sense of everything being strange, of things altering and bending,” which, “*however* real,” is “dangerous” because of its radical estrangements from “collective constructions of reality” (173, emphasis in original). According to Dick, this is not merely a matter of faulty perception; it is possible that the individual experiencing delusions or hallucinations is in fact receiving “accurate perceptions of an area of reality that the rest of us cannot...reach” (171). New Wave SF and psychonautic drug culture have more emphasis on the reparative dimensions of the *alien alterity* of such noncognitive—meaning affective and aesthetic—estrangement. These formations use disorientation devices to center the “performative, adaptive brain” and decenter the “modern, Western self”; they represent intensified versions of traditional SF and drug culture more generally, like how extreme scenarios are used in cognitive philosophy to test limit cases, and the selection of texts looks at “decentered selves” and “adaptive states” (“Cyborg Spirituality” 351). Pickering argues that “in cybernetics, as in physics, a non-dualist ontology...provided the channel through which Eastern philosophy and spirituality could run into Western science”; in this chapter, I add neuroscience as one of these “channels” through which East-West ontological “exchanges” “flow” and “reverse flow” to create a “rather

different non-modern ontology” (349, 351). The fiction and nonfiction examined in the chapter’s textual archive serves “not just as an interpretive resource for grasping altered states and strange performances, but as a source of technologies of the non-modern and non-dualist self” (353).

john c. lilly: the cybernetic psychonautic of the 1950s—

Certain chemical substances have programmatic or metaprogrammatic effects, i.e., they change the operations of the computer, some at the programmatic level some at the metaprogrammatic level. Some substances which are of interest at the metaprogrammatic level are those that allow reprogramming, and those that allow and facilitate modifications of the metaprograms. (Lilly, 1968: 23)

...control is based upon exploration of n-dimensional spaces and finding key spaces for transformations, first in decisive small local regions, which can result in large-scale transformations... (Lilly, 1968: 32)

I position John C. Lilly as an important predecessor to the New Wave of SF who was also intimately a part of the New Age counterculture; Lilly’s early work as a serious academic and later as a public intellectual of sorts cuts through to the tradition of weird science, which as previously mentioned, is foregrounded by the history of cybernetics. From 1946 to 1953, Lilly’s scientific research on neuroanatomy was revolutionary as he “developed a technique for inserting electrodes into the brains of...monkeys”; the “early brain-mapping device, which Lilly called the ‘bavatron,’ provided a real-time image of the electrical activity of the brain” (“On modified human agents” 87). In a 1949 paper, Lilly says that “the 25-Channel Bavatron” was shorthand for “brain activity visualization device” and it allowed for “electrical image records” to be further represented and analyzed with what he termed “Electro-Iconograms” (*The Deep Self* 70).²⁴ Although Lilly’s early

²⁴ In “The Electric Ant” (1969), Dick’s “schizoid android” character references this neuroscientific idea of brain activity “channels,” saying, “Remember years ago when there were—what was it?—twenty or twenty-two TV channels?”; “What would it have looked like...if this TV set projected all channels onto the cathode ray screen *at the same time*” (109, emphasis in original).

“techniques of brain mapping, electrostimulation, and sensory isolation responded to and helped stoke fears of brainwashing in the 1950s,” his later approach saw a “transformation in the isolation tank’s popular image” from a military technology of torture and brainwashing “to a democratic technology of human potential and self-actualisation, which resonated with the so called ‘politics of consciousness’ of the 1960s counterculture (Roszak, 1969)” (“On modified human agents” 87, 95). Lilly’s scholarly work in the paranoid style of American neuroscience shifted in order to test the “boundaries of experience and belief [and] to understand to what extent human ‘programming’ was hardwired into the brain, and to what extent the self was amenable to reprogramming and re-modification (Langlitz, 2006)” (96). The ‘politics of consciousness’ was about becoming aware of “the effects of storage of metaprograms which direct our thinking, programs devised by others and fed to us during our learning years” (*Programming and Metaprogramming* 14). As Lilly argues, “this is an immensely difficult area for research,” which “will require the services of many talented individuals considering their own thinking processes” if we are to finally “free ourselves from the [harmful] effects on our thinking machine of storage of material from the external world” (14). If certain aspects of New Age counterculture can be assimilated into the long legacy of self-control fantasies, Lilly’s interventions into and involvements in the countercultural scene cannot so easily be dismissed.²⁵ Pickering argues that Lilly’s research is more accurately considered amongst the “technologies of the nonmodern self” because in his findings “inner states of the brain and, by extension, the self were not to be ascribed to pure inner causes, but to intersections with the nonself” (*Cybernetic Brain* 75).²⁶ Pickering theorizes “such techniques as technologies of the

²⁵ In “The Electric Ant,” Garson Poole says, “All I set out to do originally was to search for and locate my programming circuit so I could gain true homeostatic functioning: control of myself. But with this—With this he did not merely gain control of himself” but “interfere[d] with the reality tape” which was “everything” (105).

²⁶ In “Technologies of the Self” (1982), Foucault defines “technologies” as the “specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves” (18). He identifies four technologies in “a matrix of practical reason”: “technologies of production, sign systems, power, and the self”(18). “Each one...is associated with a certain type of domination” (18).

nonmodern self” because of the specific way that the “performative brain can lead to a nonmodern decentering of the self” (75). This nonmodern decentering of the self is categorically different from the “decentering” that Derrida described as “part of the totality of an era,” which began in the late 19th Century (“Structure, Sign, and Play” 2). Derrida says the decentering of modernity is located in “the history of the concept of structure,” or when language “invaded the universal problematic,” allowing for “the interplay of signification *ad infinitum*”; this “event” effectively caused “a *rupture* and a *redoubling*” in modern understandings/representations of the self (1, emphasis in original).²⁷

Pickering argues that Grey Walter’s popular book, *The Living Brain* (1953), creates a cross-linking between science, spiritualism, cybernetics, and psychedelics. The book was “a materialist and evolutionary story of how the brain functions,” yet it was also “full of references to dreams, visions, ESP, nirvana and the magical powers of Eastern yogi” (“History of Cybernetics” 1). Oddly enough, “Walter was by no means alone on the wild side. All of the other cyberneticians were there with him” (1). Another first-generation cyberneticist, Ross Ashby, even confessed in his diary that if he had “intellectual honesty,” then he would “be a spiritualist” (1). So, Pickering argues, although the “modern brain, as staged since the 1950s by AI for example, is cognitive, representational, deliberative...the cybernetic brain *was not like that*” (2, emphasis in original).²⁸ The cybernetic

²⁷ McHale sees this longer historical arc in the shift from Modernist to postmodernist literary models of the self; the earlier “centripetal self” with “centrifugal tendencies” turns into “the centrifugal self” in the later literary period (254).

²⁸ This legacy extends further back in American history to the “Mechanical Turk,” which was “a curiosity dating back to the late eighteenth century...billed as a mechanical device that could play a decent game of chess” (Evans 559). A short story, “Moxon’s Master” (1899), written by American writer Ambrose Bierce is clearly based on the “Mechanical Turk”; “Moxon’s Master” is a precursor to the SF trope of robots, androids, and AI which anticipates Alan Turing’s essay “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” (1950) and likewise answers his question “Can machines think?” in the affirmative (443). “Moxon’s Master” (a play on the chess master) speculates on Moxon’s chess-playing automaton, an invention who then murders Moxon, its ostensible “Master.” The short story takes on racialized qualities that are absent in the Mechanical Turk, which was overtly racialized as “Turkish,” presumably to indicate the automaton’s numerical skills; in “Moxon’s Master,” the automaton is racialized as speculatively black, presumably in reference to the long history of American slavery in which enslaved African peoples were the source of free, forced labor also for sale as a spectacle of entertainment. In 1835, the Mechanical Turk was acquired by P.T. Barnum and, as scholar Louis Chude-Sokei argues, his pairing of the “Mechanical Turk” and the black slave Joice Heth in his traveling exhibition “was [Barnum’s] introduction into an American public life that he irrevocably changed and a media culture that some argue—including him—he essentially invented” (22). Evans says that “Chude-Sokei favors this moment as Barnum’s

brain was primarily “performative,” and its “role in performance was that of *adaptation*” (5, emphasis in original).²⁹ The cybernetic brain was “an organ of strange sense,” which was “capable of accessing some other, non-human and intrinsically spiritual realm” (8). In this way, what Pickering refers to as the *performative excess* of the perceptual world thus aligns with what Shavero describes as the *phenomenal excess* of sensory experience which then links up with what Ballard typifies as the *aesthetic excess* of New Wave SF. Each of these theorists is explicitly interested in practices that probe the quasi-hallucinatory properties of reality as such, which are dramatized under the influence of drugs like LSD and in other exceptional states of mind that involve both cognitive and noncognitive processing. As SF critic James Gunn says, unlike the scientific orientation of traditional SF, New Wave SF preferred the unknowability thesis inherited from its Modernist predecessors, but with a key difference which he fails to acknowledge that cybernetics accounts for (*The Road to Science Fiction, Volume 3: From Heinlein to Here* xxvi-xxvii). Pickering particularizes this point, saying, “the cybernetic ontology of unknowability, [is] where the unknowability is conceived to reside in the sheer excess of nature over our representational abilities” (*The Cybernetic Brain* 288). As the recent historical scholar Charlie Williams has already

origin because of what followed: Barnum, facing declining attendance, planted a story in a local newspaper claiming that Heth was not, in fact, human, but rather an automaton cleverly disguised as a human” (qtd. in Evans 559-560). So, while the human operator of the Mechanical Turk was “cleverly disguised” as a machine, a fact which went unstated, Barnum reversed this stance in his overt statement that Joice Heth was “an automaton cleverly disguised as a human” (Evans 560). This early 19th century imbrication of blackness and technology (and blackness as technology) reframes concerns that get taken up in the technological, science fictional, and cybernetic contexts of robots, androids, and AI in the 20th century; the historical backdrop of this American context is summarized by Evans as the following,

Heth and the Turk made for a complex diptych: one a slave purported to be a machine, the other a machine purported not to be human. The interest in both was motivated by the confusion between human and machine. Visitors flooded back to determine whether the slave was human, and whatever their conclusions, [they were] part and parcel of an overdetermined project stretching back centuries (560).

²⁹ Dick’s science fictionalization of psychonautic drug practices in his ostensible artificial intelligence (AI) combines aspects of “the modern brain...[as] cognitive, representational, deliberative” with aspects of “the cybernetic brain” as “performative” and adaptive; as Mr. Garson Poole says, “I found out I’m an electric ant. Which from one standpoint opens up certain possibilities, which I am exploring now” (“History of Cybernetics” 2, 5; “The Electric Ant” 108).

noted, “David Kaiser and W. Patrick McCray’s *Groovy Science* (2016) challenges Theodore Roszak’s (1969) claim that the 1960s counterculture was primarily antiscientific,” arguing, “rather than eschewing science altogether, the counterculture embraced certain models of science and scientific practitioners” (“On modified human agents” 86). In the first chapter of this collection written by historian Graham Burnett, Lilly is positioned as “the archetypal ‘groovy scientist’” (86).

The New Wave SF and psychonaut drug culture as represented in the work of Dick, Lilly, and Burroughs can be understood as “technologies of the non-modern and non-dualist self” that articulate nodal points of a “non-modern East-West cybernetic assemblage,” which as Pickering laments, has long since been “walled off behind the label of New Age” (*The Cybernetic Brain* 452). In this way, the New Wave and the psychonaut movement each reflect a paradigm shift that moves across different productions and practices from science through culture into literature and the reverse. Lilly’s memoirs prove Hayles’s opening directive to “resist the idea that influence flows from science to literature,” and shows “that culture circulates through science no less than science circulates through culture” (21). According to Lilly, “his reading of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* in 1934...influenced his decision to major in biology rather than physics as a student,” and prompted his nascent interest in “questions of behavioural control” (“On modified human agents” 89). The counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s might be considered the first wave precipitating what Shaviro explains as “a major change,” at least from a neuroscientific standpoint, in recent consciousness research, which the neuroscientist Bjorn Brembs describes as “a dramatic shift in perspectives from input/output to output/input” (qtd. in Shaviro 13).³⁰ This ties into what Shaviro’s theory of SF designates as “discognition,” variously referred to as the noncognitive

³⁰ Dick attempted to reverse input/output in his own experiments with taking “vitamins in megadoses,” saying, “I tried again and again to exclude the ordinary external electrical fields that we customarily tune into: man-made fields, which we consider ‘signal,’ and at the same time I tried to directly transduce what we usually think of as ‘noise,’ in particular weak natural electrical fields” (*Letters* 141-143).

processes, insofar as it acknowledges that “most thinking takes place nonconsciously, outside of our attention or awareness,” while “even more of our thinking slips away—it cannot be retained in memory, or in the form of concepts” (16). Indeed, “psychoanalysis and cognitive science,” Shaviro notes, “both tell us—albeit for vastly different reasons—that consciousness is only a very narrow and specialized part of mental activity” (16). Like Hayles says of “distributed cognition,” or distributed consciousness, “reflexive epistemology replaces objectivism” (288). Understanding the brain as “performative and endlessly explorable rather than cognitive and immediately available,” first wave cybernetics was open to new fieldwork being performed with the aid of psychedelics (“History of Cybernetics” 4). In 1948, Ashby abridged the cybernetic view: “the brain is not a thinking machine, it is an *acting* machine; it gets information and then it does something about it” (qtd. in “Cyborg Spirituality” 350). The speculative aesthetics of New Wave SF and the performance science of psychonaut drug culture each reveal the strangely familiar (sur)reality of the science fictional fact that “embodied response precedes, and does not require, intellectual apprehension” (Shaviro 16). The first chapter attempts to “show that phenomenal consciousness is irreducible,” and that it is “more widely spread than we sometimes imagine” (15).

Like Shaviro’s theory of speculative aesthetics, Pickering decouples the cybernetic brain from “reason and cognition,” instead focusing on how the “performative” brain is “immediately engaged in bodily performance and the goings-on of the world” (*Cybernetic Brain* 350). And, while we seem to have “immediate access to our cognitive processes,” Pickering notes, “we have no equivalent access to the performative brain at pre- or non-cognitive levels of being” (350). In science, science fiction, and SF as “cognitive estrangement,” the hyperfocus on cognition involves “a basic misdirection,” which slides from “wondering ‘what it is like’” into “criteria for... ‘*knowing* what it’s like,’” so “questioning gets displaced from an affective register into a cognitive one”

(Shaviro 31, emphasis in original).³¹ SF as cognitive estrangement “distances us from our everyday cognitive assumptions and frames of references,” but this same “definition also implies, at least in some instances, that science fiction works to estrange us from the very possibility of being able to cognize our ‘immediate experience’ at all” (39). We are, neuroscientists admit, “a piece of...anthropological science fiction,” which is precisely what is dramatized by the New Wave, but since this SF of the self is part of the practice of everyday life, we are “accustomed” to that which is “difficult to pin down or define” (37, 29). So, while embodied processes “provide the basis for a cognitive disposition and capacity,” those capacities aren’t themselves available for cognition (11). As an embodied practice, reading is able to immerse readers in “deep cognitive puzzles”—Shaviro cites Dick’s *Ubik* (1969) as an example—which “refuse to be contained within, the cognitive models that we...seek to apply” (39). To Shaviro, this “extra-philosophical” aspect of some notable SF results from the fact that “nonconceptual experience can still be narrated” (38).

thinking drugs

It is imperative to return to the body, to return the body. I am going to talk about language, the language of art criticism, but only insofar as that language relates to and occurs in the whole body (Acker, 1990: 82)

In the labyrinth, the self becomes lost. For the head is no longer the head; we live, perceive, and speak, in our bodies and through our bodies (Acker, 1990: 91).

Hayles argues that while Foucault “delineates the transformations that occurred when corporeal punishment gave way to surveillance,” in his work, “the engine driving these changes remains obscure” (210). Further “focusing on embodiment...to clarify the mechanisms of change,”

³¹ In cognitive science, this is known as the “hard problem” of consciousness—the “easy problems” are things like “how the eye perceives light, how the heart oxygenates the blood, how the body regenerates cells, etc.”—whereas the “hard problem” has to do with the general unspeakability of qualia (Metzinger Ep. 96; Chalmers 203). This inversion shows how the “hard problem” of consciousness scientifically displaces “hard SF” as the focus of New Wave SF, while psychologically foregrounding some of the aesthetic concerns central to the literary project of Modernist fiction.

she maintains, “requires understanding how embodiment” has relays with “inscription, technology, and ideology,” which looking at “discursive constructions...[that] also examine how embodied humans interact with the material conditions in which they are placed” can show (210). Hayles critiques Foucault’s attempt to ‘incorporate’ embodied practices into discourse, and I try to tentatively extend her insights to ‘thinking’ drug practices—which have different pleasures and prohibitions—and are often assumed to either almost certainly have or to almost certainly not have certain politics. Hayles cites the discursive plane and the plane of materiality as most often seen:

Fissuring along lines of class, gender, race, and privilege, [because of the way that] embodied practices create heterogeneous spaces even when the discursive formations describing those practices seem uniformly dispersed throughout the society. The assimilation of embodiment into discourse has the additional disadvantage of making it difficult to understand exactly how certain practices spread through a society (210).

New forms of repressive and ideological state apparatuses have arisen along with modern identity categories like the “addict”—including a whole host of moralizing and medicalizing discourses that coincide with the 20th century concept of addiction as a “disease”—authorizing a series of state interventions labeled as “rehabilitation,” which can variously result in different levels of voluntary, psychiatric, or court-mandated institutionalization, hospitalization, treatment, detox, imprisonment, incarceration, twelve-step programs, detention centers, and/or support groups. These repressive and ideologically state-sanctioned seminars in self-management are intercessions into drug practices which also act as interpellations of modern identity. The proliferation of these sorts of intensive courses and immersive curricula aimed at “reprogramming” individuals, who have been deemed “dysfunctional” in thoughts and behaviors socially-coded as displaying both excess and deficiency, is symptomatic of an ideological elision that skips over the initial social “programming” which the configuration of “dysfunctional” feelings and practices—consciously and unconsciously— have been working to individually “deprogram” and socially “recode.” This

locates a hole at the heart of institutional discourses on embodied practices which analyzing a set of alternative “discursive constructions” of drug counterculture in fiction and nonfiction can begin to rethink and relink (210). By reparatively reorienting toward the affective weight that anchors embodied social practices and allowing its way-finding pull to decenter cognitive norms and social mores, the space needed to imagine “dysfunctional” thoughts, feelings, and behaviors which now seem “unacceptable”—in ourselves and others—might have a chance to take shape as functionally distinct and differently directed but no less valid and valued than other modes of being whole in a partial world.

As Hayles notes, a methodological issue that arises is the tendency to misrepresent drug culture as some sort of all-encompassing monolithic formation, instead of as a heterogeneous, fractured, and evolving constellation of diverse forces, social groups, and embodied practices. A conversation between Lilly and Sidney Cohen, who at the time was the head of the committee for the Mental Health Institute for Drug Abuse, illustrates this problem. According to Lilly, Cohen said, “PCP and ketamine have similar molecules. Have you ever seen any violence with ketamine...[because] with PCP we see it all the time?” (“Alternity and Beyond” 11). Although laden with problematic assumptions about the types of people found in any specific drug subculture, Lilly’s response shows some of the difficulties accompanying what are often wholesale formulations about drug culture in general. Lilly reportedly answered Cohen’s query by saying:

Look Sidney, you’ve forgotten that there’s a selection of people who take PCP and a selection of people who take ketamine. All the people I know who take ketamine are professionals who have respect for their own minds and brains. They are knowledgeable and educated and not violent. But the people who take PCP are violent in the first place; peaceful people who take PCP don’t get violent (11).

While somewhat offensive, this is informative insofar as it constructs a divide between what Lilly considers to be a philosophical, scientific, and spiritual endeavor undertaken by intellectuals and

what he alternatively views as a recreational, reckless, and criminal stunt performed by amateurs. The former might represent Dick's project in "The Electric Ant" (1969), while the latter might represent *A Scanner Darkly* (1977). This perception cited by Lilly is likely related to the fact that PCP was taken off market as an anesthetic in 1965, and so PCP was chiefly available as an illegal street drug, whereas ketamine was developed as a better-tolerated anesthetic that continued to be legally available to professionals. Although this documents the uneven criminalization of different drug subcultures within the larger formation, as well as the stereotypes of members and prejudices against the practices of different social and chemical groups, it shows that the psychonaut movement was largely comprised of a relatively narrow cross-section of more highly educated and socially tolerated drug enthusiasts. My choice of the term drug enthusiasts, as opposed to drug addicts or abusers, similarly circumvents a methodological barrier touched upon by Lilly in the same interview. When asked by the interviewer how he defines "addiction" and avoided "falling into the trap of misusing the chemicals," Lilly responded, "There's drug use, drug over-use, drug hypno-use and on and on" ("Alternity and Beyond" 12). And, in yet another interview, Lilly says, "when one is doing research on a substance, one takes it so frequently that outside observers can say you're addicted, but that's a very bad definition of addiction" ("Province of the Mind" 5). If the signifier and its nuances are often related to the social status of the drug user in question, these descriptors retain some legitimacy as medical categories, which assess the user's stage of psychological and physiological dependence on the chemical in question. Still, there is some serious slippage among these classifications as well as disagreement as to what criteria should be measured in making such a pathologizing diagnosis. In other words, most members of drug culture(s) reside along a continuum between use, misuse, abuse, and addiction, labels which shift on multiple levels depending on the subculture referred to (e.g. professional v. criminal classes),

the drug itself (e.g. prescription drugs like ketamine v. illegal drugs like PCP), and the individual doing the assessment (some claimed Lilly was a “Vitamin K” or ketamine addict when he wrote *The Scientist* 1988, while he vehemently denied this categorization) (“Province of the Mind” 5). Moreover, these markers are unstable at an individual level as users often slide along this spectrum over time and can move in either direction and/or occupy multiple positions at once (or in quick succession) with one or more different drugs or drug classes. In this project, it is noteworthy insofar as it raises questions of directed interest v. non-intentionality of drug practices. Unlike Lilly, I ascribe positive value to both these modes of drug use, because as Shaviro says, the false “equation of sentience with cognition” fails to account for “nonintentional sentience” (10, 18). Recreational users are certainly more affect-driven than psychonautic definitions would admit to, and while these nonprofessionals may “not have any conception or representation of what it is that they feel,” they obviously *feel something*, which is an integral part of the embodied “thinking process” (18).

Just as Darko Suvin is ambiguous as to whether cognitive estrangement is a function of the reader or the text, a similar ambiguity can be found in the question as to whether affective or physiological estrangement is a function of the user or the drug. Is there a particular way of doing drugs that leads to generative experiences, just as there may be a particular way of reading that leads to productive interpretations? Lilly seems to suggest that intentionality matters a great deal, claiming, “if you stay interested” in the “very interesting process” of ingesting chemicals to “change the chemical configuration in your brain and body,” then “you can take cocaine or heroin or any of those things” without becoming an addict (“Alternity and Beyond” 12). Although a somewhat outlandish claim, it is possible to infer from this statement that what is important in controlled substance usage is the maintenance of a dialectical relation between the real world and the chemically altered world. In this context, to stay “interested” means to be able to reflect on the

estranging experience from the perspective of the norm and vice versa. Suvin makes an analogous claim regarding SF, in which the “new reality overtly or tacitly presupposes the existence of the author’s empirical reality, since it can be gauged and understood only as the empirical reality modified in such-and-such ways” (71). While, certainly, both reader and user possess the required agency to direct or enhance their estranging experiences, I maintain that aspects of estrangement are inherent to the properties of certain text(s) and drug(s) as a “means of reality displacement” (71). This allows me to broaden Lilly’s narrower claim about the psychonaut as researcher, whose affective or physiological estrangement is allegedly based solely on the individual’s cognitive and conceptual intent. I argue that some amount of cognitive/conceptual or affective/physiological estrangement is produced *ipso facto* from SF and drug culture respectively, precisely because each necessitates a “feedback oscillation” between the “zero world” and the “creations of new states of mind” (Suvin 11; “Which Way?” 197). In other words, there is an aspect of the psychonaut in every user, whether motivated by research or recreation. Of course, for the addict, there may be a tipping point, which occurs when the estranged reality becomes the norm, subsuming what it was meant to modulate. From this perspective, it seems the affective/physiological estrangement achieved through drug use is a more potent experience than the cognitive estrangement achieved through SF. This potency enables the practice to be more directly and immediately transformative, but it also increases the risk of transformation beyond recognition and return. Nonetheless, New Wave SF and drug counterculture each emphasize the role of both immersion and critical distance, which requires sitting too close before taking a step back.³² In these cultural formations, escapism is used strategically as a way to come back later with an alternate or altered perspective. In this sense, the pleasure underlying these practices of aesthetic and chemical consumption is neither primary nor

³² Significantly, Jenkins’s Star Trek “fanatic” and my ‘drug enthusiast’ are both considered to be “fundamentally *alien* to the realm of ‘normal’ cultural experience and...[as] dangerously *out of touch with reality*” (15, emphasis mine).

secondary, but rather integral to opening up new areas of inner space. The quest to hold two incompatible worlds in your mind, to perform the double gesture of flight and return, and to move away from and closer to reality simultaneously, demonstrates the utopian desire to have it both ways (and every which way), even if the tension produced by such paradoxical contortions is sometimes too much pressure for mind and body to bear. As Grossberg argues, “The postmodern frontier, inscribed by and on popular culture, defines an impermeable yet ambiguous gap between the livable and the unlivable, the possible and the impossible, the real and the unreal” (260). This is the unmappable space from which New Age liminal states and New Wave literary shapes *move*.

the “schizoid android”: the human biocomputer and the soft machine

Psychedelics are illegal because they dissolve opinion structures and culturally laid down models of behaviour and information processing (Mckenna, 1998: 43).

There is only one thing a writer can write about: *what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing...* I am a recording instrument... (Burroughs; 1959: 342).

In my reading, Philip K. Dick’s “The Electric Ant” (1969) and *A Scanner Darkly* (1977) create a chiasmic structure through what Hayles terms the Dickian figure of the “schizoid android” (160). Dick tends toward “cybernetic themes,” according to Hayles, precisely because of the way “cybernetics radically destabilize[s] the ontological foundations of what counts as human” (24). Importantly, Dick’s “organic robot” and human addict are simultaneously articulated in what Lilly called “the human biocomputer” or what Burroughs termed “the soft machine,” both of which were meant to designate ‘the human’ by using technological ‘metaphors’ (*Programming and Metaprogramming* 6; Appendix 4 to *The Soft Machine* 209).³³ Not incidentally, Dick, Lilly, and

³³ Burroughs’s notion of the human is “the soft machine,” which he also refers to as “a writing machine” and “soft typewriter,” relates to how these technologies are externalized forms of thinking and hardware for memory storage

Burroughs were all self-described drug users, and at times, even self-proclaimed addicts, which again complicates reading the “schizoid android” as simply a science fictional trope; however, the ‘easy’ reading of New Wave writing—in this example, Dick, Lilly, and Burroughs—as mostly or merely metaphorical is not exactly right either. As Lilly says,

All human beings, all persons who reach adulthood in the world today are programmed biocomputers. No one of us can escape our own nature as programmable entities. *Literally*, each of us may be our programs, nothing more, nothing less. Despite the great varieties of programs available, most of us have a limited set of programs. Some of these are builtin. (*Programming and Metaprogramming* 6, emphasis mine)

The figure of the “schizoid android” in the texts I engage are unlike those that Hayles pulls from in her theorization of this puzzling personality which she argues appears as a recurring trope across Dick’s earlier writing. Unlike Hayles figure of the “schizoid android,” the two characters examined in my chapter one—from Dick’s 1969 and 1977 texts—are gendered-male. Moreover, in *A Scanner Darkly*, I apply the “schizoid android” configuration to a human character who is explicitly not an android; while in “The Electric Ant,” I argue the “schizoid android” arrangement of the android character is best read as an allegory for the human. This reading enables Hayles’s theory of the “schizoid android” to move in two directions to include a broader understanding of ‘the human’ which does not just seek to exclude those who have been identified as carrying the signifiers of the “schizoid android” from the category of the human. Hayles argues that in the selection of Dick’s work she looks at, the problem of where to position the observing subject (re: male) and the observed object (re: female) is often equated with how to ‘know’ whether a character is human or android. “For Dick,” she maintains, “the android is deeply bound up with the gender politics of his male protagonists’ relations with female characters, who ambiguously figure either as

(Appendix 4 to *The Soft Machine* 209; *The Ticket That Exploded* 51,125). This relates to his similar claim, which is: “A tape recorder is an externalized section of the human nervous system” (*Ticket* 80).

sympathetic, life-giving ‘dark-haired girls’ or emotionally cold, life-threatening schizoid women (24). In other words, “the gender politics he writes into his novels illustrate the potent connections between cybernetics and contemporary understandings of race, gender, and sexuality” (24). By removing the feminist optic from her critical lens and refocusing on two of Dick’s texts that feature ostensible ‘drug-addicts’ who conform to the schizoid android’s parameters while collapsing its categorical consignments (in resisting being socially-coded as either properly ‘female’ girls or improperly ‘human’ women), I set my sights on a new politics emerging from the cybernetic fold.

In “The Android and the Human” (1972), Dick argues our new technologies “are becoming alive, or at least at least quasi-alive,” Dick’s 1969 android is described as having a “quasi-organic brain,” while “we—the so-called humans—are becoming, and may to a great extent always have been, inanimate in the sense that *we* are led, directed by built-in tropisms” (“Android and Human” 183; 187, emphasis in original; “Electric Ant” 109). As Lilly says, “certain programs are builtin, within the difficult-to-modify parts of the...structure of the brain itself...are those of feeding, eating, sex, avoidance and approach programs, certain kinds of fears, pains, etc.” (*Programming and Metaprogramming* 20). Still, “the mind includes unconscious and instinctual programs” and “is the sum of the programs and metaprograms, i.e., the software of the human computer” (22). Lilly says that for him, this cybernetic intersection of the animal and the machine was “formed in 1949, when [he] was first exposed to computer design ideas,” which he went on to integrate with “[his] neurophysiological research on cerebral cortex” (4). Dick’s claim is comparable to Lilly’s because his abiding “conviction that humans may be more like machines was...inspired by Wilder Penfield’s experiments in the electrical stimulation of the cortex,” specifically citing “publications from 1959” (Enns 109). In “Drugs, Hallucinations, and the Quest for Reality” (1964), Dick refers to Jan Ehrenwald’s *Telepathy and Medical Psychology* (1947), a book which “concluded that

schizophrenic hallucinations represent the telepathic reception of...other people's thoughts"; even suggesting that "telepathic sensitivity might cause schizophrenia" (Enns 141). In 1964, then, Dick voices to an idea his 'android,' Garson Poole, will reiterate almost verbatim in the 1969 short story,

'[E]xternal reality' consists of a subjective framework by the percept system...Up until the last three or four years it would have been generally agreed that [hallucinations] originate in the person, at some level of the neurological structure, but...research, especially with hallucinatory drugs, points to the probability, whether we like it or not, that, as in the case of Jan Ehrenwald's paranoids, the percept system of the organism is overperceiving...[and] this overperception emanates from outside the organism ("Quest for Reality" 172-173).

Still, such schizophrenic delusions and hallucinations—even if viewed as telepathic sensitivity—often resulted in "a state of delirium or confusion, followed by a break-down and disintegration of the personality" (Ehrenwald qtd. in Enns 147). New Age uses of the self as cybernetic-spiritualistic transmitter/receiver able to tune into signals endanger the stability of the self when overwhelmed by noise it cannot tune out. Lilly names the two sides of schizoid over-perception (sensory excess) and android under-perception (sensory deficiency) in more standard language: "There are such phenomena as 'informationoverload' and 'informationdeprivation'" (*Metaprogramming* 67). Using Hayles, Lilly, and Dick's New Wave terminology, the "androidism" of underperception (*informationdeprivation*) is what Arctor says is "an endless nothing"; while the "schizoidism" of overperception (*informationoverload*) is as Dick says "an endless now" (*Scanner* 88; *The Book of Changes* 176). The "schizoid android" figure in Dick's SF evidences the following intersection:

If machines are like humans in having neuroses, humans are like machines in having neuroses that can be modeled mechanically. Linking humans and machines in a common circuit, the analogy constructs both of them as steady state systems that become pathological when they fall into reflexivity (Hayles 65).

As Dick says, "Anyhow, there is a certain parallel between what I call the 'android' personality

and the schizoid. Both have a mechanical, reflex quality” (“Android and Human” 201). In “The Electric Ant,” the ‘android’ character uses psychonautic ‘drug’ practices to intentionally induce a sort of ‘schizoid’ experience; while in *A Scanner Darkly*, the ‘schizoid’ character’s recreational drug practices unintendedly reduce him to a sort of ‘android’ existence. The earlier story from 1969 has more reparative potential insofar as ‘thinking’ drugs, while the later novel from 1977 has a more paranoid bent to its narrative arc; however, in my reading it is more important to note how in *Scanner*, Arctor’s life among “the straights” (or non-drug users) as the undercover agent “Fred” is already a version of what can be considered an ‘android-like’ existence. When he is interviewed by a psychiatrist for work, he “heard the mere mechanical quality of his voice, like that of a dutiful child in school. Agreeing to obey whatever dull order was imposed on him by those in authority...in a position to impose their...will on him, whether it was reasonable or not. Just agree, he thought. And do what you're told” (93). From this vantage, both Poole and Arctor’s use of allegorical and fictionalized ‘drug’ practices respectively appear as an intervention into their ‘unthinking’ acceptance of the status quo, which demands their rote, programmatic functioning in a social system that disallows for the feeling of affect out-of-bounds. So, as Dick maintains, “Man or ‘human being’ are terms which we must understand correctly and apply, but they apply not to origin or to any ontology but to *a way of being in the world*” (“Man, Android, Machine” 212, emphasis mine). In this sense, the category of ‘the human’ is not a matter of biological or mechanical speciation, but rather “it is the added dimension, in terms of functional hierarchy” (212). In Dick’s view, this primarily has to do with ‘kindness’ as opposed to one’s own ‘kind’:

if a mechanical construct halts in its customary operation to lend you assistance, then you will posit to it, gratefully, a humanity which no analysis of its transistors and relay-systems can elucidate...As one of us *acts* godlike (gives his cloak to a stranger), a machine *acts* human when it pauses in its programmed cycle to defer to it by reason of a decision (212, emphasis in original).

cognitive function and dysfunctional affect

The cost of sanity in this society, is a certain level of alienation (Mckenna, 1998: 34).

Once a drug becomes *illegal*, it acquires a sulfurous glow from the depths of Hell (Burroughs, 1995: 38).

As Shaviro points out, “feeling is something that happens without, or before, concepts,” and that “prior to these modes of conceptualization,” feelings must be regarded as “fugitive and ungraspable; and perhaps also *as nonfunctional, or even dysfunctional*” (17, emphasis mine). In each of Dick’s respective ‘drug’ texts, I draw out this notion of feelings as nonfunctional, or even dysfunctional, which as a conceptual tool hits on how the inversions of these two fictional models *work*. Prioritizing affective orientations, or by making affect the primary plane of effects, shows how what may be evolutionarily coded as ‘nonfunctional’ or ‘dysfunctional’ serves a wholly different, non-survival-based ‘function,’ which is nevertheless what makes life in these two drug narratives livable, if not survivable. This critical approach resonates with Lisa Marie Cacho’s call to “conscientiously work against the logic of survivability,” and positions drug practices as “methods of meaning-making” which question the logic of the claim itself (33, 2). As Burroughs says, “Everyone must ask himself what are my survival terms? Which is the question of who or what he wants to survive with. What will I do in order to survive? Become a fink, a narc, a collaborator? Find out who your friends are and who your friends are not. Find out who your friends are and tell us where you stand” (*Naked Scientology* 82-84). In Dick’s narratives, drug practices also have a social function because they are linked to subcultural communities. While this is less true of “The Electric Ant” as Poole conducts his ‘drug’ experiments without needing an alternative social economy to procure illegal drugs, Sarah refuses to leave him and decides “to stay,” even “if [she] can’t stop [him]” from “kill[ing] [him]self” (113). And even in Poole’s

accidental death approximating an overdose, “Sarah was all around him, so was Danceman” (114). In *A Scanner Darkly*, written in memoriam of Dick’s drug addict friends, the close-knit friend group of like-minded social rejects is the affective cornerstone of the novel. Affect—unfiltered affect—is what is in danger of not ‘surviving’ the social conditions of modern life; appropriate affect as dictated by societal strictures disallows for the expression of certain thoughts, feelings, and behaviors because if you “told anybody...they'd freak and get the hell out and then [you'd] have no friends, nobody to talk to” (47). As Lauren Berlant argues in a different context, so too I suggest of drug culture, in that it powerfully,

names a relation of attachment to compromised positions of possibility. What is cruel about these attachments...is that the subjects who have *x* in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object or scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the *content* of the attachment, the continuity of the form of it provides something of the continuity of the subject’s sense of what it means to keep on living and to look forward to being in the world (24).

In each of the narratives, dysfunctional affect carves out a space that cognitive function closed off as a matter of course. By doing what they categorically should not be doing, the characters make affective processes possible again in world which is hostile to them and which rejects their affect because it falls outside of the regulatory norm. Poole, as an android, has been “unintentionally posing” as a human; Arctor, as an addict, has been intentionally “posing as a nark” (“Electric Ant” 103; *Scanner* 164). They each struggle with the questions Arctor formulates as: “What is identity? he asked himself. Where does the act end? Nobody knows” (*Scanner* 24). I submit that the ‘reason’ nobody *knows* is that identity is something one *feels*. And that the ‘truth’ of feeling is emphatically not one found through cognition. In this way, it is indeed “fugitive and ungraspable” although not, as it were, out of reach (Shaviro 17). The desire to go ‘off-script’ and drop ‘the act’ of mainstream society and its internalized ‘set’ of expectations preserves the “utopian impulse” in the unlivable,

if survivable, social spaces of the stories (*Demand the Impossible* 57).

In “The Electric Ant,” when Garson Poole notices the diminished way other humans begin to interact with him after learning of his less-than-human status, he is overwhelmed “with furious, impotent anger” (102). His terse responses are bitterly laden with adjectives denoting a shift in his affective disposition: “Poole said savagely,” “Poole said acidly,” “Poole said acridly,” “he said, nettled,” “he broke in harshly,” “Poole interrupted,” “he said, irrationally,” and “he said thickly” (102, 103, 108, 110, 111, 114). Clearly drawing on terms drawn from the real history of American slavery, the doctor who refuses to treat Poole explains that the bill will still need to be paid—either by him if he is “self-owned” or by his “owners”—ending with: “In any case, you’ll be back at your desk at Tri-Plan, *functioning* just as before” (102, emphasis mine). Poole replies, “Except...now I know” (102). Later, when Poole describes his status as “a slave,” the technician replies, “You’ve had *fun*,” to which Poole responds sardonically, saying, “I’ve lived a good life...I’ve worked hard” (103, emphasis mine). This idea that ‘functioning’ as a self-surveilling unit of productive labor is ‘fun’ and that living ‘a good life’ means having ‘worked hard’ satirizes “modern productivism” while literalizing the Fordist, “body as machine” (Rabinbach 3, 185). When leaving the hospital from which he has been discharged due to his designation as an “electric ant”— instead of “Mr. Poole,” he is now “just Poole”— he thanks the staff for their “humane attention” (“Electric Ant” 102). The honorific “Mr.” (an abbreviation of “Mister” which also used to mean “Master”) denotes men of a higher social rank. Poole is no longer his own “master” but “a slave”; he is not even a human (or man) but an android (or ant). The word “humane” in Poole’s comment as opposed to “human” flags that he himself has not been treated as a human but it also implies that the people attending to him have not acted toward him in a human way. ‘Humane’ means ‘to have a civilizing or refining effect on people,’ but the social decorum of civilized conduct has been to politely strip

Poole of his humanity and send him on his way. Being ‘civilized’ is thus not synonymous with being ‘human,’ only with following a set of prescriptive rules that keep those within a stratified social hierarchy in their place. The deviant behaviors Poole will engage in for the rest of the story purposefully violate the established social order. Contrary to productivist discourse about “the need to conserve and restrict *the waste and misuse* of the body’s unique capital—its labor power,” Poole now begins to use (or misuse) his body for his own purposes (of getting ‘wasted’) (Rabinbach 6, emphasis mine). When getting “repairs,” he asks, “Is this guaranteed?”; the repairman answers, “Unless subjected to unusual or intentional abuse,” which Poole counters with, “That sounds vaguely suggestive” (“Electric Ant” 103). As a form of so-called “nonproductive expenditure,” drug abuse is outside the efficiency model and while bodies may to some extent comply with the machine model, Dick’s story shows the psychological excess which is produced as a byproduct of productivism (Bataille 117). Upon his request, a computer tells Poole: “All sense stimuli received by your central neurological system emanate from that unit and *tampering* with it would be risky if not terminal” (“Electric Ant” 105, emphasis mine). Then, after an overdose-like experience, the technicians confront Poole, saying, “You’ve been *playing* around with your [reality] tape,” which he cops to, they ask: “Why would you want to *fiddle* around with that? Don’t you know what you could do?” (110, emphasis mine). In response, Poole says, “I’m not sure,” not quite believing him, they say, “But you have a good idea,” after which Poole ends the exchange with: “That’s why I’m doing it” (111). When unable to decide if or why he should go into the office, Poole thinks, “it undermines you, *knowing* this...he *felt* differently, now” (103, emphasis mine).

In *A Scanner Darkly*, Bob Arctor feels boxed into the ideological confines imposed by the larger social structure, which is most evident when he is ‘acting’ in his official capacity as “Fred.” In these exchanges, there are marked changes in his voice and intonation that show his affective

detachment and further show that his use of short, commonplaces is a sort of conversational filler devoid of content: “‘It gets me,’ Fred said in his mechanical monotone”; “‘Something like that,’ Fred said tonelessly” (46). When Arctor is giving an anti-drug speech as the undercover informant Fred, he thinks how there was: “The waste of time for him out of this, plus anger on his part, and a sense of futility each time, and always more so” (20). Addressing the crowd, he says: “If you saw me on the street, you’d say, ‘There goes a weirdo freak dooper.’ And you’d feel aversion and walk away” (20). The sardonic truth of this description of his social role—as a low-life addict, actual outcast, and less-than-human ‘doper’—is then affectively modulated with an inside joke that flips in the obverse direction. He continues: “What I fear,” he starts quietly, “is that our children, your children and my children...I have two,” quieter, “Little ones, very little,” before the crescendo, “But not too little to be addicted, calculatedly addicted, for profit, by those who would destroy this society” (21). First, Arctor says something affectively real for him in the guise what’s expected and then parrots what he considers to be the absurd or false feelings of the audience. Each strategy allows for him to say one thing while feeling another so as to better tolerate the cognitive dissonance of his position between two social worlds. The novel literally stages Arctor’s affective alienation when he can’t perform the appropriate situational script required of him: “‘Each day,’ Fred, Robert Arctor, whatever, said, ‘this disease takes its toll of us’...He broke off. For the life of him he could not dredge up the rest of the sentence, even though he had repeated it a million times” (21-22). “The straights,” he thinks to himself, are “ready to open fire on any and every dooper who” steals paltry items so that “*he can get his fix*” (22, emphasis mine). The idea of a “fix” as slang for drugs, I suggest, is germane. There is something is ‘malfunctioning’ in the would-be addict (or in the social context in which they reside) which drugs effectively (and affectively) remedy and not by turning the addict into a ‘junk machine’—although this is thematized in the story as well—but

by allowing for some control over negative feelings (and also supplanting them with positive ones). The reparative reading of drugs in the admittedly paranoid novel is that drugs and drug culture provide real relief which *functions* chemically, socially, and symbolically. Arctor “stared at them, at the straights...and he thought, Substance D can't destroy their brains; they have none” (22). Of course, what Arctor actually seems to be referring to here is again *affect*; he cannot understand the cognitive position of “the straights” because of the way affect dredges the pathways that define the patterns into which cognition subsequently falls. Actor’s identity is bound up with his drug use and his alternative community of drug-users in a way that is not about them being ‘broken’ but is about their not ‘fitting in’ with the ideological mainstream. Their behaviors are a set of countercultural values and needing a ‘fix’ is not the same as needing *to be* fixed. Later, Arctor learns that the “new audio- and holo-scanners...did not automatically edit out as did his verbal report all...mention of himself” (87). Now, he realized, his cover was blown; instead of “he himself as Fred,” who informed on his “suspects” as an undercover officer, “there would be Robert Arctor *tinkering* with the holos when they *malfunctioned*” (87, emphasis mine).³⁴ Fred now has to go through the holo-scans to “edit out Arctor,” but “just...when he went to *fiddle* with the holos” (87, emphasis mine).

³⁴ In “We Can Remember It for You Wholesale” (1966), the protagonist’s “memory implants” lead to profound his confusion; he asks his wife, “Why can’t I rely on you? They haven’t *tinkered* with you” (11, 17, emphasis mine). This again tracks the same language that moves from the technological to the psychological back to the neurological; these “extra-factual memory implants” are from “Rekal, Incorporated” (17, 11). The term “memory-track” as used in the story mirrors the “time-track” as used in *Dianetics*; Hubbard’s practice of “auditing” was meant to uncover repressed memories but—as Dick’s story replicates and reverses—it was accused of constructing or fabricating the memories it was said to recover. The filmic adaptation, *Total Recall* (1990), seems a concise version of Dick’s title, but it also flags that “Rekal, Incorporated” might directly allude to Scientology because the phrase “total recall” is drawn straight from Hubbard’s own vernacular. In 1950, Hubbard put on a live demonstration and the “rally...promised to be Dianetics’ finest hour, for...the identity of the world’s ‘first clear’ was to be announced” (*Bare-Faced Messiah* 163). According to an interview with Arthur Jean Cox, a “teletype operator” who’d attended the demo, the title belonged to Sonya Bianca who Hubbard said would prove her abilities to the waiting crowd (165). When things didn’t go as planned, Hubbard defended the failure in the terminology of *Dianetics*, saying when “he called her forward, asking her to come out ‘now,’ the ‘now’ had frozen her in ‘present time’ and blocked her *total recall*” (166, emphasis mine). Obviously, “We Can Remember It for You Wholesale,” a title which is more than a little verbose like Hubbard’s religious writing, suggests that nothing can be remembered by or for anyone wholesale and alludes to the corporate aspect of *Dianetics*. While filming *Total Recall*, Arnold Schwarzenegger was also living in “The Casa” in San Bernadino, CA, which had been the former headquarters of Scientology as well as L. Ron Hubbard’s home address at least until his death in 1986.

When reviewing holo-scan scenes (or videotaped recordings) of him in bed with Connie, he notices a discrepancy: “Halfway between, he decided. Still half Connie; already half Donna. I better run this over to the lab, he thought, it's been *tampered* with by an expert. I've been fed fake tape” (143, emphasis mine). Arctor says “the technical side of this” must be: “Like another AM station filtering in, interfering—Crosstalk, he decided. Like that: accidental. Like ghosts on a TV screen. *Functional, a malfunction*. A transducer opened up briefly” (143, emphasis mine). In the novel, “crosstalk” or “cross-chatter” is “between hemispheres” when, as a result of prolonged abuse of the drug “Substance D,” a person experiences “thoughts not [their] own” (92-93). This is described as “*functional, a malfunction*” because what is coded as “*a malfunction*” allows for another albeit unintended function to emerge, which is not strictly speaking “*functional*” (143, emphasis mine). As Dick argues, in altered states, “the percept system of the organism is perceiving what is actually there, and it should not be doing so, because to do so is to make the cognitive process impossible (“Quest for Reality” 173). According to Dick, “the problem” with drug experiences, paranoid schizophrenia, and unshared hallucinations “actually seems to be that rather than ‘seeing what isn’t there’ the organism is seeing what is there—*but no one else does*” (173, emphasis mine). It is a social problem, then, one which an alternative community responds to at the outset in its formation.

Dick’s addict immediately moves from talking about the ‘literal’ technology of the fictional “holo-scanners” to nonfictional technologies of radio “interfer[ence]” and television “ghost[ing]” and then to the ‘nonliteral’ technology of the human brain experiencing a fictional effect (or defect) of hemispheric “crosstalk” or “cross-chatter” (*Scanner* 143). Tracing this metaphoric network sets up Dick’s ‘literal’ use of technology—both fictional and nonfictional—as a direct analogy for the ‘nonliteral’ technology of the human “percept system” (“Quest for Reality” 173). Arctor describes the “*functional...malfunction*” (or defective effect) as something like “a transducer [being] opened

up briefly”; Dick also writes of his own drug experiments as being something like “tun[ing] in” to a cosmic “broadcast” which he could still fail “to transduce properly (error at the receiving end)” (*Letters* 145). The Dickian configuration of the “schizoid android” is thus not reducible to a science fictional trope as from this critical perspective the figure appears as a New Wave author-surrogate who is conducting spun-out self-experiments of self-hacking. So, while the ‘android’ character is told that an amateur “*tampering*” with his “reality tape” would be “risky if not terminal,” the addict character describes the “fake tape” he’s been “fed” as having been “*tampered with by an expert*” (“Electric Ant” 105, 113; *Scanner* 143, emphases mine). In each of the narratives, the terms tampering, tinkering, fiddling, and playing, as well as functioning and malfunctioning, are invoked multiple times in reference to altering or modifying ‘technology,’ or to indicate whether or not the technology is ‘working’; however, my reading of technology as an allegory for and extension of ‘the human’ (and of drug practices as an already literal method of ‘self-hacking’) tracks the science fictional idiom shared by these texts to uncover a thematic convergence. Tracing the use of the word “scanner” in both narratives reveals it as a technological metaphor for the “interface” of “the percept system” of human consciousness, which is further extended and delimited, exposed and obscured, by the addition of new technological interfaces. An interface intercedes, mediates, and distances us from reality while at the same time bringing us closer to, putting us in contact with, and giving us access to reality.³⁵ Dick’s short story cuts across outer (technological/ideological)

³⁵ In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935), Walter Benjamin says film “offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment”; however, “the equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality is [precluded by] technology” (14, 13). What seems to provide direct access is an illusion that erects more distance at the same time it appears to penetrate more deeply. In these SF narratives, Dick uses technology as a distancing device that at the same time brings the perceptual interface into view. Scanners literally represent the body *from the outside* through disembodied technologies and dramatize experiences of embodiment *from the inside* through the technological metaphor of the body as a perceptual scanner. As Hayles says, “Since the body and embodiment, inscription and incorporation, are in constant interaction, the distinctions... are heuristic rather than absolute. They nevertheless play an important role in understanding the connections between an ideology of immateriality and the material conditions that produce the ideology” (208). The word “scanner” as used in Dick’s SF shows that “as the body

and inner (perceptual/phenomenological) “medial interface[s]” with two quotations both of which use the word “scan” or “scanner” (Enns 3).

‘Scan me visually,’ [Poole] instructed the computer. ‘And tell me where I will find the programming mechanism which controls my thoughts and behavior’ (“Electric Ant” 104).

If I cut the tape, he realized, my world will disappear. Reality will continue for others, but not for me. Because my reality, my universe, is coming to me from this miniscule unit. Fed into *the scanner* and then into my central nervous system (105, emphasis mine).

Similarly, Burroughs says that much of his work is concerned with what he calls “the electronic revolution and the alteration of old scanning patterns” (*Rub Out the Words* 528). Dick’s novel also dramatizes “consciousness as a medial interface” through his biblical allusion, which incorporates his outwardly science fictional “new audio and holo-scanners,” and literalizes and allegorizes the inward processes of conscious and unconscious (im)perception (Enns 3; *Scanner* 87).

I understand, [Arctor] thought, what that passage in the Bible means, Through a glass darkly. But my percept system is as fucked up as ever (*Scanner* 177).

‘Through a mirror,’ Fred said. A darkened mirror, he thought; a darkened scanner (175).

Still, the novel’s technological novum is not purely allegorical, as it moves across inner/outer “medial interface[s]” of self/surveillance that has been internalized/externalized through both an intensification/amplification with scanners as ideological and repressive state apparatus (Enns 3).

Arctor sensed the silent constant scrutiny, the electronic presence, of the holoscanners (*Scanner* 107).

is to embodiment, so inscription is to incorporation. Just as embodiment is in constant interplay with the body, so incorporating practices are in constant interplay with inscriptions that abstract the [embodied, incorporating] practices into signs” (214). Together, Dick’s twin narratives render a fully visible erasure of the experiences of embodiment for which the body is being scanned *from the outside* by flipping back-and-forth from this perspective to the perspective of the body which is scanning *from the inside* (214).

As Dick says, articulating the two uses of the word “scanner”: “‘We see as through a glass darkly,’ Paul says in First Corinthians—will this someday be rewritten as: ‘We see as into a passive infrared scanner darkly?’ A scanner which, as in Orwell's 1984, is watching us all the time?” (“Android and Human” 25). Continuing, however, he concludes: “This, for me, is too pessimistic, too paranoid. I believe First Corinthians will be rewritten this way: ‘The passive infrared scanner sees into us darkly,’ that is, not well enough to really figure us out. Not that we ourselves can really figure each other out, or even our own selves” (26). This shifts what are the more postmodernist tropes of the novel back to the chief concerns of Modernist writing, which focuses on the problem of knowing another’s consciousness while also recognizing its essential unknowability—which is even more opaque than one’s own. As the Modernist Ford Madox Ford writes in *The Good Soldier* (1915), “Who in this world knows anything of any other heart—or of his own?” (126).

“The Electric Ant” (1969)

How much of what we call ‘reality’ is actually out there or rather within our own head? The ending of this story has always frightened me... image of the rushing wind, the sound of emptiness. As if the character hears the final fate of the world itself (Dick, 1987: 391).

becoming human: the android as psychonaut

The two concepts, drugs and computers, are migrating toward each other (McKenna, 1991: 101).

Philip K. Dick’s “The Electric Ant” (1969) is a complex text functioning on more than one level; however, for the purposes of this chapter, I limit my analysis to one focused interpretation. My reading situates the short story as an allegory of human drug use that is conceptually dislocated through the familiar SF convention of “the renegade robot,” who is also a highly sophisticated artificial intelligence (AI) (McHale 256). From this viewpoint, Mr. Garson Poole, an “organic robot,” is noteworthy insofar as he reveals aspects of the human, rather than because of questions

he may raise about AI (“The Electric Ant” 101). Although a lesser-known work in Dick’s literary archive, the 1969 short story is widely regarded as an early precursor to the 1980s cyberpunk motif of “self-hacking”; however, in my reading, the story demonstrates how New Wave SF was equally concerned with “self-hacking” in a way which has been largely overlooked in criticism on these literary movements. I argue that “self-hacking” as literalized in 1980s cyberpunk SF often fails to notice how “self-hacking” was already literalized in New Wave SF of the 1960s and 1970s because the use of drugs (and other modes of consciousness alteration) *is* a literal form of “self-hacking,” which is not limited to the narrower literary field of science fictional tropes. My allegorical reading of “The Electric Ant” as informed by psychonaut drug culture of the period allows for a different interpretation to emerge that lends further support to Ballard’s observation about New Wave SF, in which “what appear[s] to be the science fictional elements...in fact play[s] a metaphorical role” (‘Myth Maker of the 20th Century” 129). Dick’s short story moves across metaphorical and literal language through *the language of technology* and *the technology of language*. The signature move of New Wave SF is the defamiliarization of what at first glance might seem to be the exceedingly familiar codes and conventions of the SF genre.

I argue that Dick’s narrative represents a direct and dual articulation of New Wave SF and psychonaut drug culture, which demonstrates the intricate web of connective tissue that binds these formations with a coherence that moves beyond the critical commonplace. By displacing altered states of human consciousness onto an engineered form of nonhuman consciousness, Dick’s short story highlights the structural dependency of these literary and cultural formations within a single text. In this case, Dick’s New Wave SF uses the language of SF as a vehicle for testing out the existential motivations, philosophical implications, and experimental results of psychonautic practices. The former represents a sort of science fictional genre-hacking that bends literary and

scientific language, while the latter fictionalizes a real sort of self-hacking that breaks perceptual and ideological constraints. Dick's "shock of dysrecognition" works in reverse from his definition of SF as a genre because the story thematizes one's own self as the 'technology' in question; more typically, according to Dick, the "shock of dysrecognition" is when a reader realizes that the world of the story is not their own, but in this story, it is more of a misrecognition until the SF language once recognized as a sort of slant metaphor causes a "shock of dysrecognition." The language of SF, the reading of the world, and the world of the reader are estranged again but now in a different direction than the previous reading's more familiar form of estrangement had seemed to suggest. It's a defamiliarization of what's become familiar in the estranging parts of the genre, which also functionally reroutes cognition through another less familiar type of cognitive logic. Speculative aesthetics (discognition) meets cognitive science (cognition) in the science fiction (recognition) in which the "conceptual dislocation" (dysrecognition) takes an unexpected turn toward inner space. In "The Electric Ant," I maintain that drugs can be understood reparatively, if a bit romantically, as an epiphany hack, where the key or cheat or code triggers something like instant enlightenment. Just as SF is a catalyst for "a chain reaction of ideas" to go off inside the reader's mind, so drug practices are for neurotransmitters to fire inside the user ("My Definition of SF" 99). The "drug does not produce the transcendent experience," Leary argues, but "merely acts as a chemical key" which "opens the mind [and] frees the nervous system of its ordinary patterns and structures" (*The Psychedelic Experience* 11). So, Dick's short story recodes Modernist epiphany in the postmodern literary and cultural context, in which traditional SF and scientific discourse on new technologies, specifically about computers and consciousness, had saturated the historical frame. Bloch's description of drug experiences as revealing an "ambiguous wink of nirvana"—or what Benjamin called "profane illumination"—is takes a slanted approach to Modernist writer James Joyce's

“epiphany,” which the Modernists associated with the realm of pure aesthetics (qtd. in Boon 30). In keeping with the New Wave, which I argue is both doing and undoing Modernist (and postmodernist) tropes and traditions, Dick’s story suggests a more ambivalent epiphany, combining the Modernist aesthete’s desire to unveil the absolute with the New Age practitioner’s quest to unlock enlightenment. In the context of Dick’s narrative, Garson Poole’s consciousness alteration experiments—whether his self-tinkering is read allegorically (as an extended metaphor for the human use of mind-altering drugs) or literally (as a literal representation of a robot’s body-modification techniques)—represent an attempt at hacking into his own mainframe to take over his processing platform in order to modify his primary programming. Indisputably, the series of self-experiments Mr. Garson Poole conducts bears a certain likeness to Lilly’s own efforts at what he called “*selfmetaprogramming*” in his *Programming and Metaprogramming in the Human Biocomputer* (1967), “the work and...notes [of which] are...from 1964 to 1966” (84, emphasis in original, 4). In this how-to manual of New Age self-hacking, Lilly “imagines the brain as a piece of computer technology” (Jahromi 30). This intertext shows that reading the story through the later cyberpunk motif misses a prehistory and is not even the most obvious way of reading Dick’s story.

In the narrative of “The Electric Ant” (1969), Dick’s own philosophical insights and drug experiences are recast through his textual construct of Mr. Garson Poole. The story begins with Garson Poole’s discovery that he is not a human, as he formerly believed, but rather “an electric ant”—a term he doesn’t know offhand but that he can “decipher” (101). The comment establishes an immediate parallel between language processing and computer programming as having to do with practices of coding and decoding. While the neologism is a derogatory shorthand for “electric android,” also called “andys” or “robys” to refer to “organic robot,” Dick’s use of the specific term in the title has a double valence. The implication is that like ants who are not androids, Poole has

some sort of antennae for receiving signals, which in the cybernetic-spiritualist paradigm carries a dual potential for command-control and/or cosmic-communication.³⁶ The narrative begins when Poole wakes up from a period of unconsciousness after a car-crash in a “hospital bed in a three-bed ward and realize[s] two things: that he no longer had a right hand and that he felt no pain” (100). He assumes he’s been given an “analgesic”—one of the painkillers listed by Lilly along with “tranquilizers,” “narcotics,” [and] “anaesthetics” in his experimental notes—but he soon learns that this is an inbuilt feature of his “programming” (“Electric Ant” 100; *Programming and Metaprogramming* 22). The loss of his right hand is mentioned several more times in the story to drive home the significance in a neuroscientific context. In “Man, Android, and Machine” (1976), Dick references the work of the psychologist Robert Ornstein in relation to the split-brain experiments, supporting his idea that:

we have two entirely separate brains, rather than one brain divided into two bilaterally equal hemispheres....*the left is like a digital computer; the right an analogue computer*...our personality is constructed in our left brain...our right brain...is the not-I (220-221, emphasis mine).

Poole’s lack of a right hand, which is controlled by the left hemisphere of the brain, thus signifies his realization that his personality (or self) is absent (or artificial); since the left hemisphere is the sequential consciousness or digital computer of the brain responsible for analytic processing, his intelligence is likewise rendered artificial in nature. Interestingly, in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1964), the three tell-tale signs of Eldritch, which flash up in others whom he has taken over in some way, are a robotic right hand, artificial eyes, and metal teeth. Eldritch of course comes to power through marketing an alien hallucinogen that he claims to have discovered in “the Prox

³⁶ Bob Marley famously described his dreadlocks as his “spiritual antennae.” For this reason, there was a time I had a single antenna. I no longer have it due to an accidental overlap with me and a book assigned in Kate Cumming’s class.

System,” which is also where “the real owners” of “Tri-Plan”—the company Poole thought that he owned but which he is actually owned by—live (“Electric Ant” 107). While Eldritch is a human, he is rumored to have acquired three prosthetic stigmata by becoming some sort of a God or near-equivalent in the Prox System accounting for his many manifestations through Chew-Z drug users. Poole’s self-interpellation (resulting from the absence of his right hand, which happens to have already been robotic) is an inversion of Eldritch’s social-infiltration (presenting as the presence of a robotic right hand, which had formerly been human). In each of these cases, the left hemisphere (the ‘I’ or ‘ego’) is flagged as in some ways already artificial, replicable, inauthentic, and non-existent. What is a negation in Poole’s sense of self is a proliferation of Eldritch’s spectral selves, but this logic is also reversed as Poole’s negation leads to his identity-affirming resolution and Eldritch’s proliferation to an identity-threatening dissolution. ‘Ego’ expansion is a sort of dispersal, just as ‘I’ negation is a sort of revelation. The number three is also symbolically significant in the later short story and is mentioned in various forms—“three separate police systems, all here on Terra,” “one third in advance and the usual three-year lease-option,” and the three-character management of the “Tri-Plan” company—it creates a leitmotif that is thoroughly New Wave in its odd, updated the three-part psychology of id, ego, and super-ego familiar to psychoanalysis (101).

In Modernist fiction, McHale cites centrifugal tendencies of the centripetal self that doesn’t fully fracture until the postmodernist poetics; this story fulfills and reverses both of these features. The Modernist aspect is fulfilled while reversing postmodernist tropes because at the start of the story, Dick has already split one character into three; however, the reader cannot reintegrate these three characters epistemologically (or psychologically) until the very end when the world of text itself disintegrates ontologically (or literally), and even then, only through a close reading of the literary language. The ontological or literal disintegrative experience of the characters in the text

and the world of the text is what retroactively reveals the epistemological or psychological unity of Dick's three seemingly separate characters. The postmodernist centrifugal self thus appears as textually fractured as an injunction to reorient to the text centripetally. The motif of the centrifugal self is taken to the extreme in notable postmodernist exceptions to more mainstream postmodernist texts, which more typically show this fragmentation through linguistic metaphors; McHale argues that in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), for example, characters are seen literally splitting off into multiple characters or evaporating across the very pages of the text (254). These exceptional postmodernist texts thus have further commonalities with cyberpunk than postmodernist writing more generally. This "literal disintegrative experience" is prefigured, fulfilled, and importantly also inverted in "The Electric Ant" (254). The three characters are not seen literally splitting off in the pages of the text but they are shown through the metaphorical language to be psychologically split from one another; however, their failure to realize this leads to the reader seeing them literally evaporate at the story's end. When Poole "dies," Sarah begins to "see through" her own hands and notes that "the walls of the room, too, had become ill-defined," and "through her legs the carpet showed, and then the carpet became dim"; she notices "already Poole had become vague," just as the "further layers of disintegrating matter" ("Electric Ant" 113, 115). This prefigures the literal disintegrative experience of cyberpunk and *Gravity's Rainbow* at the level of the self and the world; equally, it represents Dick's postmodernist deconstruction of the textual medium of the narrative universe. The difference is that the centered, centripetal self of Modernist writing is interpellated through the figurative language and linguistic metaphors which Dick uses to signal to the reader that the three characters need to be psychologically and interpretively reintegrated: the centrifugal self is literally plural and unstable, which unhinges the ontological foundation of the textual world. Poole says he wants to reverse the direction of time like "a video tape running backward," which

I argue is exactly how Dick's New Wave story is meant to be read (112). Burroughs says, "I believe that all writing is the transcription of a film...It's all a film run backwards..." (*The Wild Boys* 21).

The ending's metalepsis brings us back to Poole's aside to Sarah, when he says "'You're not real...Do you also have an existence in another reality tape, or one in an objective reality?' He did not know; he couldn't tell"; Sarah hesitates, saying, "I am real," to which Poole replies, "I want to know you completely" (113). While a cyberpunk reading might assume the metalepsis point proves Sarah is "a stimulus-factor on [Poole's] reality tape" and thus isn't "real," and a postmodernist reading might assume it proves there is no reading except for that of an ontologically unstable world shown through a self-deconstructing text, I argue that metalepsis in the New Wave has a more positive, reconstructive function which is derived from the inward turn that looks back toward Modernism and returns us to the language of text. With regard to Sarah's ontological status, Poole admits, "He did not know; he couldn't tell" before expressing a desire "to know [her] completely" (113). This epistemological aporia is thus imbued with a romantic sentiment which is Modernist in the way it problematizes knowing another's consciousness without giving up on the desire to do so. The language—"he couldn't tell"—recalls Graham Harman, who says, "aesthetics is a matter of allusion, rather than one of representation," which is in keeping with the aestheticism of New Wave SF (qtd. in Shaviro 38). In my reading, Sarah is real. She is a part of Poole whom he wants to know but cannot access directly. The story destabilizes the supposedly sharp line between subjective and objective reality by allusively asking two interrelated questions: In what way is the unconscious "real"? In what way is a hallucination "unreal"? As Dick himself said, "our 'unconscious' is not an unconscious at all but another consciousness, with which we have a tenuous relationship" ("Man, Android, and Machine" 220). Shaviro's notion that the speculative aesthetics of "science fiction can *allude* to...states and conditions that exceed any possibility of direct

depiction or explicit conceptualization” is dramatized in the descriptive and poetic sections Dick uses to convey Poole’s self-induced altered states (38, emphasis in original). Shaviro distinguishes “speculative fiction” from “naturalist” or “mimetic fiction” in that it makes “a point of telling—allusively or indirectly—that which...cannot be shown” (38). While this is true to some extent, as Dick’s writing in these quasi-hallucinatory sections is “telling” (or describing) what Poole “sees,” there is also a way that New Wave SF shows rather than tells. For instance, when Poole says, “he couldn’t tell,” he is using the phrase as it is commonly used to mean that he doesn’t know or can’t discern whether or not Sarah is “real.” But it also emphasizes the fact that because he cannot “tell,” he wants to “see” for himself through direct experience. This shifts the terms laid out by Shaviro in which speculative aesthetics is about allusively telling because Dick’s text uses indirect aesthetics (telling) for the cross-purposes of representing direct experience (showing). Since text is not a directly visual medium, there is no way that any text—whether mimetic, naturalistic, or otherwise—could “show” anything; there is also a way that literary language—whether in science, speculative, or mainstream fiction—is meant to “show” (albeit through a style of “telling”) by linguistically simulating other senses (like sight). This is a literary effect of what Burroughs’s describes as *the synesthesia of language*, which is a feature of its literal integration into the brain.

Just Dick’s naming of his three characters is indicative of the text’s specifically American New Wave stylistic: Garson Poole, Louis Danceman, and Sarah Benton. Deviating from traditional SF conventions, Garson Poole seems to be a literary allusion to Grace Poole, a character in *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte, and he also represents the sun; then, citing the American history of adventure magazines, Louis Danceman appears to reference pulp hero Moon Man (1933-1937) by Fredrick C. Davis, who stands-in for the moon; and finally, Sarah Benton, although there is an unpublished Dick story called “Stability” (1947) with a character named Robert Benton who is

“faithfully tending his machine,” “Sarah” rhymes with “Terra” (the Earth in SF and the short story), which she signifies in a symbolic pun. Garson Poole is also symbolically positioned in the narrative of as the sun.³⁷ In the second paragraph, he looks out at “the late afternoon sun, and the brilliance of the aging light pleased him. It’s not yet out, he thought. And neither am I” (100). While the sun is going down, presumably, I argue the comment foreshadows that Poole himself is going to “go out” (or “burn out”), but he hasn’t “yet” (100). The fact that Poole is an “electric ant” who is also “the sun” show his later requests for what are essentially magnifying glasses—he puts himself “under the enlarging-lens system” to study his circuitry—illustrates this same point in a way that really only Dick could (106). In the beginning of the story, Poole “is faced by Louis Danceman, in charge of Tri-Plan’s activities while he, Garson Poole, was elsewhere,” which suggests the way that the moon and sun alternate in relation to the earth; Danceman is further described as having a “big, fleshy face with its moon’s surface of pock marks” (100). Sarah Benton’s relation to Poole is explained as “hovering close by, mothering him in her jejune, infantile way” because “all heavy-set women like to mother people” (101). This idea of a “mother” figure who is also “jejune” and “infantile” relates to Mother Earth’s cycles of birth and rebirth, as well as the association of nature and naivety; her portrayal as “heavy-set” could refer to the ‘weight of the world’ or simply to emphasize her symbolic role as a woman who in the story is also literally ‘the land’ or ‘the body’

³⁷ In *Jane Eyre*, Grace Poole is a red-haired, drunken servant and keeper of the insane ward, Bertha Antoinetta Mason; the Irish name Grace is an anglicized version of Grainne, etymologically related to the Gaelic word “ghrian,” meaning “the Sun.” Analogously, the name “Garson” has the word “arson” in it, which if you flip the “ar” to “ra” and use the homophone “sun” instead of “son,” all parts of these sounds/spellings are associated with “sun,” “burning,” or “fire.” If you invert the last sound/spelling one more time—“Arson” to “Ra Sun”—you get to the avant-garde Afrofuturist composer and proponent of his own science fictional cosmic philosophy who went by Sun Ra—“Arson” to “Ra Sun” to “Sun Ra”—this gets even weirder as Sun Ra’s real name was Herman Poole Blount. Active on the American music scene from the 1930s-1990s, his experimental jazz fusion “Arkestra” (or “Orchestra,” if you sound it out) also picked up on Rag-time music. If you read “Rag” backwards you of course get “Gar,” which again gets us back to the name Garson Poole. Dick’s “schizoid android” says he is going to do “Something that no human can do. A symphonic score entering my brain outside of time, all notes, all instruments sounding at once. And all symphonies. Do you see?” (111, emphasis mine). For those familiar with the estranging electronic synthesizers and the full orchestral improv style of Sun Ra’s signature sound, this description given by Garson Poole will likely strike a chord.

of the triad (101). The centripetal pull of the story is returned in the psychological symbolism of the sun, the earth, and the moon. In the gravitational orbit of these three bodies the centrifugal self finds its moving center. Recognizing the complex relation between outer space and inner space—the visible and the invisible, the known and the unknown, the objective and the subjective—reveals the unique function of New Wave SF’s poetics. Taking the three-body problem well-known in mathematical representations of outer space and reapplying its logic to lesser-known psychological dimensions of inner space shows how scientific knowledge beyond our ability to conceive it has become overly familiar through repeated abstract engagements while psychological experience beneath our conscious perception has become entirely unfamiliar through prolonged introspective neglect.

To briefly return to Grace Poole in the 1847 gothic novel, which marks the beginning of industrial capitalism in the British context (this period in America is dated slightly later as beginning in 1876), her role as a servant is significant for thinking about its relation to the short story and for thinking about the SF genre more generally, in particular the specific language that it uses in its fictionalized tropes. The literary allusion to Grace Poole who is a human servant in the British context at the beginning of the industrial revolution seems to make sense in a reading of Garson Poole as new kind of “mechanical slave” in the American context over a hundred years after this earlier transition to “wage-slavery” capitalism as a SF intensification and literalization of automatized labor and false consciousness. Paul March-Russel’s “Science Fiction, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde” (2018) from “Part I—Before the New Wave” discusses the origins of the term “robot,” meaning “serf or slave,” as popularized in “Karel Čapek’s...play, *R.U.R.* (1920)” (127). Čapek’s term “robot” is a derivative of the Czech “*robota*,” meaning “forced labor,” which is etymologically-related to Slavic “*paō*” meaning “slave.” March-Russel argues that “the word’s

fast acceptance into the critical vocabulary of modernists” was used as “a kind of shorthand for the dehumanizing effects of urbanization and bureaucratization from which movements such as modernism had emerged” in order to show “the extent to which modernist discourse also transected the science-fictional” (127). Instead of literal readings more familiar in the repertoire SF, he argues:

the unthinking automatism represented by the robot encapsulated the process that [Wyndham Lewis] termed ‘the piecemealing of the personality’: the delusional and farcical belief that humans retain individual agency when..under the technological and bureaucratic forces of modernity, they are merely automata performing the part of being ‘human’ (127).

Poole expresses a similar sentiment: “I’m a freak, he realized. An inanimate object mimicking an animate one. But—he felt alive. Yet...he felt differently, now” (“Electric Ant” 103). Just before, in reference to his status as an “organic robot,” he says, “the delusion that I am human and alive” has been akin to “unintentionally...posing,” describing himself as “A slave...A mechanical slave” (102-103). This “blurring of man and machine” in the wake of industrial capitalism and during the rise of mechanized labor is thus associated with modernity; however, March-Russel argues, the figure of the robot also “invokes the uncanny, proto-science fictional lineage of mechanical dolls in literature that include Olympia in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s ‘The Sandman’ (1817), the gynoid Hadaly in Villier’s *Tomorrow’s Eve* [1886], and the murderous chess-player in Ambrose Bierce’s ‘Moxon’s Master’ (1899)” (127). *Tomorrow’s Eve*, or *The Future Eve*, popularized the term “android” in the English language.³⁸ Dick’s story uses the terms “robot” and “android” interchangeably, and the

³⁸ In the French novel, *Tomorrow’s Eve* (1886), the word used is closer to “andraiad” as opposed to “android” as both “robot” and “android” technically denote “maleness.” Marking the gendered aspect of the cultural imaginary, Čarek’s *R.U.R* uses the term “robotess” and Villier’s use of “aiad” is presumably from the Greek “naiad” or “nymph.” At the end, the female android is magically revealed to have taken on the spirit of another woman before drowning on a ship while she was travelling with the cargo. Isaac Asimov’s “The Vocabulary of Science Fiction” (1979) credits *R.U.R* with introducing the term “robot” in general and to SF in particular and coins the term “gynoid” for female-appearing variants of “androids”; although, he says, “‘Android’ is used for artificial devices that mimic either sex—or, for that matter, that are neuter” (8). ‘Android’ means ‘man-like’ from the Greek ‘andros’ or ‘man’ as opposed to ‘gynos’ or ‘woman’ (8). On the same page, Asimov says, “the proper word for ‘apelike’ is ‘pithecoïd’ from ‘pithekos,’ the Greek word for ‘ape’” and “‘anthropoid’” would be a more correct, less sexist term for the SF trope, but it is likely not used

modifiers—“electric android” and “organic robot”—signal a change from earlier uses of these nouns as does “mechanical slave.” Organic and mechanical would typically be oppositional terms, whereas robot and slave are etymologically related. Dick’s idiomatic changes are foregrounded by the genre through built-in assumptions of technological advances in computer programming and mechanical engineering; in my reading, I focus on contemporary neuroscience and cybernetics to render the story allegorically and to bring out its New Wave intervention into SF. While my reading looks at the android as a metaphor for the human in general in the context of the psychonaut counterculture of the 1960s, this aside acknowledges a subtext to the SF tropes of the robot and the android. The critical account of the literary and historical origins of these terms fails to recognize the ways that they continue to participate and perpetuate racialized discourses that derive from the history of black slavery. “Forced labor” did not begin in modernity or in the industrial revolution; in fact, the most brutal forms of it ended when it began in the decades following the American civil war. Dehumanization and alienation are not features unique to modernity wrought by new conditions of labor imposed by urbanization and industrialization, unless we only consider historical experiences of white populations. The scholarly elision of the prehistory of the industrial phase of capitalism in discussions of Modernism and science fiction, especially in the American context, starts with modernity as a sort of historical shortcut from which to track everything after that point, which misses the racial grammar that structures the metaphoric matrix of literature,

“because of the ape-like flavor of the word” (8). What all of this misses is the profoundly racist, racialized history of colonialism, of modernity, and of SF, in which the entire concept is embedded; the very idea of creating new classes of ‘animal-like’ or ‘machine-like’ peoples imagined to be less-than-human ignores the fact that “those engaged in involuntary servitude” have historically been enslaved Africans who were taken as cargo to the American continent for forced manual, domestic, and sexual slave labor. Suffice to say that every SF narrative with robots and androids is at the same time “pornotroping” on the real history of black slavery which went on for nearly 300 years prior (Spillers). Asimov’s comments might be recast as what Hortense Spillers called the “violent ungending” of the middle passage. “Moxon’s Master” explicitly racializes a male-gendered automaton also described as “ape-like”; *Tomorrow’s Eve*’s “andraiad” is gendered female and then also racialized as black; and *R.U.R*’s use of “robot” and “robotess” is gendered. It seems “The Vocabulary of Science Fiction” could use an update that actually attends to the sources it claims to cite.

technology, and culture. The cultural imaginary from which SF figures of the robot and android derive is a half-forgotten collective memory of European colonialism and American slavery. These figures are racialized as “speculatively black” (Ellis 6). Edisonades, Steam-Man of the Prairie, etc.

Returning to the argument of the chapter, however, Poole’s discovery of his ‘nonhuman’ status results in a destabilization of his worldview that denaturalizes the ideology which until that point had cohered in his thinking. This knowledge causes an existential crisis of sorts because he realizes that what he formerly took for granted as his identity now seems to be nothing more than “a delusion implanted in [him] when [he] was made” (102). After being transferred from the hospital to a repair shop, a technician tells Poole that there were surely signs indicating his artificial status, but that he had “never guessed because...[he was] programed not to notice” (103). Although easily read as a commentary on the limits of AI, I argue that proper attention to the historical context reframes the text’s function as primarily allegorical. The story is actually commenting on the limits of the human through the figure of the android, dramatizing what the phenomenal opacity and aesthetic excess of our conscious perception and embodied processes through the guise of computational and mechanistic metaphors familiar to SF. Dick’s involvement with cybernetics, psychoanalysis, and psychedelics further supports this allegorical reading of the text, which speculates on the boundaries of the human as another type of complex information processing system. Dick’s story defamiliarizes the language of computer science and traditional SF in order to restage psychological realism with a new neuroscientific backing. In the process, the story reconfigures humans as “organic robots,” which is not the overly familiar science fictional trope but rather a defamiliarized science factual truism recognized in contemporary consciousness research (“Electric Ant” 114). In *The Ego Tunnel* (2009), Metzinger says, “the conscious brain is a biological machine—a reality engine” (20). The observation parallels to Dick’s “organic robot”;

Poole's "reality-supply construct," Lilly's "human biocomputer," and Burroughs's "soft machine" ("Electric Ant" 104; *Metaprogramming* 84; *Soft Machine* iv). Metzinger says that "biological organisms have two different kinds of organs," and that "one kind, such as the liver or the heart," make up "part of an organism's 'hardware'"; the other kind is "a virtual organ," like "the immune system" and "consciousness," which is a sort of software or program that "boots up" as a set of functional properties that are only realized "transiently" (56). We are also 'programmed not to notice' the lapses in this transient function as the "epistemic self" simply flits away and experience that is often described as "losing time." Consciousness understood as a "virtual organ" adds to the discourse surrounding "the conditions of virtuality" in Hayles as well as showing how New Wave SF fits into Shaviro's project of speculative aesthetics. Inner space *is* a sort of cyberspace, to retrofit McHale, as well as a shared, quasi-hallucinatory one, engineered by our own consciousness. Poole, as a speculative form of engineered consciousness (AI) and of engineering consciousness (drugs), is thus particularly relevant if we are reverse engineering human consciousness as in altered states.

The perspective provided by Lilly historically grounds my analysis of Dick's text in another realm of cultural production that moves beyond the literary. Lilly and Poole's research is animated by principles of process philosophy, which attempts to comprehend the workings of the mind and its relation to reality. Furthermore, the historical context of cybernetic and psychonautic interest in the brain shows that an allegorical reading of AI in "The Electric Ant" is not only justified, but also necessary if we are to engage with the breadth of the theoretical questions being posed. This backdrop substantiates a reading of Poole as a character who forces us to question whether and to what extent humans are simply another category of complex machine, with a corresponding "matrix fitted in place, a grid screen...[which at least partly determines] certain thoughts, certain actions...[while forcing us] into others" ("Electric Ant" 101, 103). However, the knowledge that

we are not entirely self-determining has liberatory dimensions, which are cited by Poole, who says, “I am not free...but now I know it; that makes it different” (103). This is illustrated by Poole’s question as to if he should “go into the office” or not, and why he would choose to do either one (105). He decides not to for reasons that seem obvious except for the fact that most of us and Poole is no exception typically go into work without question for reasons that are perhaps practical but also ideological. When Poole returns home, he begins to investigate the nature of his existence with the help of a “class BBB computer,” and is startled by his baffling “maze of circuitry” (104). Then, Poole finds out that he possesses more individual agency than he formerly assumed, as he is equipped with a “reality-supply construct” instead of a “programing turret” (104). I argue that this finding evidences the allegorical function of the narrative as a speculation on the anatomical human percept system as our own version a “reality-supply construct,” because like Metzinger’s “reality-engine,” it determines “all sense stimuli received by [the] central neurological system” (105). In other words, when Poole realizes that his programming is more flexible than he had formerly supposed, he becomes enamored with the prospect of altering or modifying the processing platform, or his “quasi-organic brain” (109). Upon consideration, Poole decides he will tamper with his reality tape as a trial designed to give him unmediated access to “ultimate and absolute reality,” even if only for “one microsecond” (112). This impulse echoes Leary’s ideas of switching out filters of perception as a method of widening one’s “reality tunnel,” a metaphor that as an “electric ant,” Poole literalizes in some ways (101).³⁹ Poole does acknowledge the possibility that he simply wants to die, and that the direction of his research is only a slight detour toward the death drive. When asking himself what such an experiment might prove, Poole admits that he

³⁹ *The Ego Tunnel* (2009) is a direct reference and neuroscientific update to the concept of a “reality tunnel,” which Timothy Leary and Robert Anton Wilson developed as a way for talking about perceptual closure in *Neuropolitique* (1988) from Leary’s earlier book *Neuropolitics* (1977).

“would know no more than...now, which is not enough” (112). The ambiguity of the language shows that what he knows now is not enough, and that even when he knows more than he knows now, it will not be enough. Nevertheless, he cannot let go of his utopian longing to “know the universe in its entirety, to be momentarily in contact with all reality” (111). Indeed, Poole entertains the hope that we could “learn to be selective; do [our] own job of perceiving what we wanted to and what we didn’t” with practice, which might liberate the individual from the dictates of arbitrary biological or ideological systems of perceptual filtration.

When Sarah asks, “Are you *fixing* yourself?”, Poole responds, “I’m *freeing* myself” (106, emphasis mine). Here getting his “fix” is not about ‘function’ but about getting free of those narrowly defined confines. Although it is unclear if Poole is freeing himself from his owners, his operating system, or the unrelenting mechanisms of reality itself, I argue the latter is his primary motivation. Moreover, the radical freedom that Poole endeavors toward is at least partially facilitated by his suicidal nihilism. If the grave is the goal, or at least one possible and accepted outcome, risk-taking behaviors and experimental procedures are opened to the individual unfettered by mortal fear.⁴⁰ In other words, it is this embrace of death that allows Poole to live dangerously, and aggressively pursue knowledge no matter the costs, and regardless of the consequences. As Metzinger explains, “all of this is merely an internal shadow of something inconceivably richer...a low-dimensional projection of a higher dimensional object ‘out there’... [in] a region in your neural state-space”; and while “this state-space itself may well have millions of dimensions,” it is dwarfed by the “physical reality you navigate with its help,” which “has an

⁴⁰ The psychonautic devil-may-care attitude toward death and dying is further evidenced in a troupe of post-New Wave writers and artists that follow in the movement’s wake. Tom McCarthy created the International Necronautical Society (INS) in 1999. In the founding manifesto, the INS claims that it is a “neuro-necro-network,” arguing, “death is a type of space, which it intends to map, enter, colonise and, eventually, inhabit.” It has a Techno-Chemical Division and promotes the psychoactive euthanizing drug Thanadrine. It also recalls McHale’s observation about postmodernist fiction and cyberpunk in which individual and collective death is the final frontier (where everyman has gone before). *Remainder* is a fairly good example of a post-New Wave SF text that would be worth thinking through in those terms.

inconceivable higher number of dimensions” (22). This idea of navigating reality with an internal map is satirized in the section of the story in which Poole’s self-experiments cause aspects of the city to disappear while he is trying to drive home. First, “cabs” have vanished, so he decides to do something like drunk driving, but then “vehicles and buildings, streets, [and] signs” disappear as well until he is forced to drive into “the center [of] nothing” for “fifteen minutes” until suddenly “New York reappeared” and he could “finish his trip” back to his apartment for more experiments (107-108). Of course, to “finish his trip,” he first had to *stop tripping*, playing on the navigational metaphors of the psychonaut of inner space and counterculture slang of a drug experience as a trip.

Later, when Poole explains his intentions to “experience everything” simultaneously to the two technicians, who have just revived him from his previous trial ending in an automatic system shutdown, they respond at once, saying, “It’ll burn you out” (111). Unmistakably, the medic-mechanics phrasing links the android’s thrill-seeking behaviors to that of his human counterparts, who although not referred to as “ants,” except in *A Scanner Darkly*, are often deemed “burn outs” from their drug abuse and addiction. The expression is equally noteworthy in the human context, as it implies that the over firing of electrical and chemical neurons in the brain can cause one to “burn out,” not unlike a light bulb (which in *A Scanner Darkly*, correlates symbolically with a sustained cognitive deficit). Meanwhile, Poole’s reasoning echoes the countercultural idea of mind-expansion, which might be induced through the use of psychedelic agents and psychonautic practices. He keeps saying, “How can I test this?” and “He had to test his theory” (106, 108). As Lilly argues of his theory and experiments, reclassifying different drugs to fit his specific purposes:

Certain chemical substances have programmatic and/or metaprogrammatic effects, i.e., *they change the operations of the computer*....the term ‘reprogramming substances’ may be appropriate for compounds like lysergic acid diethylamide. For substances like ethyl alcohol the term ‘metaprogram-attenuating substances’ may be useful (*Programming* 23).

Poole's position aligns with other proponents of psychoactive substances in his deadly serious investment in the ontological implications of influencing one's percept system, rather than only epistemological ones. This aligns with Brian McHale's characterization of postmodernism and SF, which "raise and explore ontological issues" that can be arranged along a "*parallel...vertical axis*" to "juxtapose worlds occupying *different* ontological planes" (247, 251). In total, Poole conducts four self-experiments, which correspond to specific strategies of altering human perception and consciousness. Even more than Lilly, Poole's self-experiments can be styled as "a posthuman strain of performance art," or as Clarke terms it, "*experimental performance science*" (Hayles; 10, emphasis in original). First, Poole "smear[s] out stimuli" by filling in holes on his reality tape, which causes objects in his world to disappear, while leaving his bodily perception intact (106). Next, he cuts "a horizontal strip" out entirely, but reinserts the tape, which causes "absolute blackness" and "space without depth" as the "awareness of his own body had departed along with everything else in the universe" (108, 110). The first two tests closely resemble inhibitory methods of consciousness modification, specifically sensory deprivation. In the second, the experience closely resembles the effects of Lilly's drug of choice in the isolation tank and in general, which is the dissociative *anesthetic* ketamine. Dick narrates the experience in *an aesthetic* that also recalls some of the creepier sections of *Ubik* (Lilly has a better time with this compound):

He squinted, trying to see. He made out Sarah Benton, sitting in the bed: a two-dimensional figure that doll-like had been propped up, there to fade and dwindle...the room closed over and fell into itself, as if sealed off from reality...stiff and unyielding....Reaching, he tried to touch something. But he had nothing to reach with...even if he had, there would be nothing for them to feel. I am still right about the way the damn tape works, he said to himself, using a nonexistent mouth to communicate an invisible message...I can only wait, he realized. And hope it won't be long...he thought on and on, categories slithering through his fright-haunted mind (110).

After this trial, Poole decides he will “prick new punch-holes in the tape,” denoting an excitatory method of consciousness alteration, which results in his sensory overload accompanied by visual and auditory hallucinations in line with the effects of psychotropic drugs, such as LSD (112). Dick describes this one with a much more positive example which borders on metafiction:

In the center of the room appeared a flock of green and black ducks. They quacked excitedly, rose from the floor, fluttered against the ceiling in a dithering mass of feathers and wings and frantic in their vast urge, their instinct, to get away. ‘Ducks,’ Poole said, marveling. ‘I punched a hole for a flight of wild ducks.’ Now something else appeared. A park bench with an elderly, tattered man seated on it, reading a torn, bent newspaper. He looked up, dimly made out Poole, smiled briefly at him...and then returned to his folded-back newspaper. He read on (112-113).⁴¹

His last experiment is to cut the tape entirely, an action that he takes knowing it will very likely lead to his demise; the estranged poetics and sensory descriptions of this nonconceptual experience are at their most topsy-turvy in a whimsical way which is still very weird and doesn’t bode well:

He saw apples and cobblestones and zebras. He felt warmth, the silky texture of cloth; he felt the ocean lapping at him and a great wind, from the north, plucking at him as if to lead him somewhere...through the night skies and daytime and flooding and drought. Butter relaxed into liquid on his tongue, and at the same time hideous odors and tastes assailed him: the bitter presence of poisons and lemons and blades of summer grass. He drowned; he fell...and the warning noise of a defective elevator dinned shrilly in his ear (114-115).⁴²

However, in the final moments before he dies, clearly suggesting an overdose, Poole transcends his ego in a paradoxical epiphany: “I am living, I have lived, I will never live” (115). Although some might argue that Poole does not achieve a “true” epiphany, but rather is duped by something

⁴¹ The metafictional aspect is in part from the autobiographical material on Dick’s in which he discusses his love of ducks and his choice of living in a house where he could see flocks of wild ducks fly over in their seasonal migrations. The “park bum” who sees Poole, smiles, and reads on resembles Dick’s self-described penchant for people watching and seems to be the authorial figure of some future version of Dick that flashes across to Poole in an ontologic breach. When Poole excitedly asks Sarah, “Do you see him? And the ducks?”, she says, “They weren’t real. Were they? So how—”, after which he cuts her off, saying, “You’re not real” (113). A rather precise assessment of the circumstances.

⁴² The elevator, of course, is a metaphor for the unconscious. See Colson Whitehead’s novel, *The Intuitionist* (1999).

more like apophany, I argue that the story's conclusion suggests otherwise.⁴³ In fact, it is an early example of McHale's "metalepsis," which he claims represents the "only escape" in postmodernist texts, which is found in an "ontologic plane breach" (115). Likewise, I argue Poole bypasses or shortcircuits objective reality, "a synthetic construct, dealing with the hypothetical universalization of a multitude of subjective realities" entering "ultimate and absolute reality" ("Electric Ant" 105).

In other words, Poole recognizes that his objective reality is a no longer "consensual group hallucination," which masks the true nature of things at least as much as one's own subjective reality (McHale 252). In this way, Dick's New Wave story prefigures and literalizes McHale's comments on cyberpunk and cyberspace, but moves in a different direction.⁴⁴ Indeed, Dick reveals that inner space, or Metzinger's "neural state-space," is already a "hallucinatory landscape," which is experienced by everyone who 'jacks into' the perceptual system, thus extending McHale's idea to the "primary reality plane" (252). In Poole's final and fatal experiment, he opens his mouth "to bring forth words—a specific string...out of the enormous mass of them brilliantly lighting his mind, scorching him with their utter meaning" ("Electric Ant" 115). This description of Poole's interiority closely resembles what Leary describes as the "characteristic features" of "psychedelic experiences," which are "the transcendence of verbal concepts, of space-time dimensions, and of the ego or identity" (Leary 11). Besides, I argue that the phrase "utter meaning" indicates that Poole has undergone something more akin to ontological rupture, or even rapture, than mere epistemological disclosure.⁴⁵ If we accept that Poole has indeed broken free of reality's confines,

⁴³ German scientist Klaus Conrad coined apophenia in 1958 to describe "an acute stage of schizophrenia, during which unrelated details seem saturated in connections and meaning." So, while an epiphany reveals "true intuition of the world's interconnectedness," an apophany "is a false realization" (Waldman).

⁴⁴ To McHale's "metalepsis," itself a modification of "syllepsis," the term 'metaliteral' instead of 'literal' seems apt in describing this double-movement of New Wave SF, in which the literary language is not simply metaphorical nor is it exactly literal, at least not in the sense to which we are accustomed in using the words. This literal turns inward.

⁴⁵ As J. Hillis Miller argues in "Should We Read *Hearth of Darkness*" (2002), both Modernism and deconstruction resemble "the genre apocalypse," which he claims is always already "a failed apocalypse." "Apocalypse" is the Greek word for "unveiling," and a feature of the genre is that "each veil lifts to reveal another veil behind it." The result is

then Poole's first-person narration and the story's representation of lineal time can no longer be applied. This is supported by the text itself, which abruptly shifts into Sarah's perspective and ends with a third-person omniscient narrator. Earlier on, Poole prophetically tells Sarah, "If I cut the tape...you will be everywhere and nowhere. Just like everything else in the universe" ("Electric Ant" 113). At first appearing solipsistic, a closer examination suggests that Poole is not referring to subjective or objective reality, but to the absolute reality of atomized dispersal across space-time. The ending of the story lends credence to this interpretation, because, as Poole predicted, Sarah and her world begin to dissipate into nothingness. The final lines of the story offer a haunting glimpse of ultimate reality stripped of stabilizing illusions: "The wind of early morning blew about her. She did not feel it; she had begun, now, to cease to feel. The winds blew on" (115). In this closing scene, Dick performs an evasive provocation that Hayles notes appears in much of his work: Dick "constructs the event so it hovers suspended between internal fantasy and exterior corroboration, using...multifocal narrative techniques that operate in his other novels [to]...to infect...[them] with ontological uncertainty" (181). Additionally, the ending can be read in terms of McHale's definition of "*trompe-l'oeil*," which is "deliberately misleading the reader into regarding an embedded, secondary world as the primary, diegetic world" (115). Usually, McHale argues, "such deliberate 'mystification' is followed by 'demystification,' in which the true ontological status of the supposed 'reality' is revealed, and the entire ontological structure of the text consequently laid bare" (116). In this reading, then, Poole's sudden "metalepsis" sends the reader spinning out in a sort of "ontological vertigo," while revealing Sarah's world as lacking an independent ontological status through the narrative technique of "*trompe-l'oeil*" (Stone 326). We might interpret the ending as narratively replicating something like the observer effect, in which

"a non-revelatory revelation" or "a non-revealable secret," which can be used to describe "The Electric Ant," and could also be seen as a reparative reading of apophany (372).

the loss of our point-of-view character, Poole, results in the atomized dispersal of particles that were Sarah but which now lack an observer. From this vantage, the collapse of the textual world results from the expansion of the wave-function, which when it is collapsed is what causes particles to assume a definite state. The story thus represents what an observer cannot ‘see’ in the quantum physics experiment, which illustrates the obverse of what is observed to give a speculative view on the observer effect. Hayles comments on *Ubik* (1969), written the same year as “The Electric Ant,” are similarly instructive, “for if *Ubik* is intended to signify an ultimate ‘authentic’ reality, it can do so only from a perspective *inside the text*” (187, emphasis in original). “Metalepsis” is also an attempt to get *outside the text*, or at least to gesture toward an outside, but it does so through the “bracketing [of] ‘reality,’” moving toward “the creation of ever more inclusive systems” (189).

In “Man, Android, and Machine” (1976), Dick reveals investment in ontological questions, which I associate with “ultimate and absolute reality” as opposed to the epistemological difficulties of subjective and objective reality (112). Dick says we must “realize that a veil...lies between us and reality” (“Man, Android, Machine” 214). The veil is the “obscuring mists of lineal time,” or an energy “binding together all phenomena and maintaining all life, that by its *activity* hides the ontological reality beneath its flow” (217). Indeed, when Poole says, “I would like to control time. To reverse it,” he expresses Dick’s own philosophical proposition: “we experience time backward; or more precisely, that our inner, subjective...time experience, is orthogonal to the flow of time itself” (“Electric Ant” 112; “Man, Android, Machine” 215). Said again, there are “two times,” the inner time we perceive moving from past to future, as well as the “outer time flow of the universe,” which “moves in a different direction” (215). This idea is supported by the theory of special relativity,⁴⁶ which violated standard notions of space-time that were inexplicable through classical

⁴⁶ Einstein’s theory of special relativity displaced the earlier theory of “luminiferous aether.” Aether theory imagined a plenary medium that allowed light to travel through empty space. It recalls Ross Ashby’s theory of the brain as a

mechanics. Reading “The Electric Ant” with this in mind, it becomes possible to imagine the final image of roaring wind echoing through deafening emptiness as aesthetically alluding to an underlying ontological reality ordinarily hidden beneath the occluding shroud of time. In that sense, it may be either the beginning or the end of time, as neither term would adequately describe the true nature of “orthogonal time,” which is “rotary” (216). So, Dick’s conceptualization of space-time, then, accords with physicist Brian Greene’s observation: “Absolute space does not exist. Absolute time does not exist. But according to special relativity, absolute space-time does exist” (34). The theory of general relativity supports the idea of true time being rotary in the sense that “every occurrence, regardless of when or where, is represented by some point” on an all-encompassing continuum, “which exists absolutely and can be sliced from any direction” (130). This metaphor provides a “fictitious vantage point” from which to speculate on the universe as if it were viewed from a point outside space-time (130). This abstract formulation of a hypothetical position resembles Dick’s story, which attempts to imagine a perspective that looks out from inside the black box of reality and in from outside the black box of consciousness. For Dick, “the struggle for freedom often expresses itself as an attempt to get ‘outside’” and “the ultimate horror for the individual is to remain trapped ‘inside’ a world constructed by another being for the other’s own profit” (Hayles 162). If we apply this to Poole, his reckless behavior, which I’ve articulated to the utopian longings of psychonaut drug culture, has a space of redemption that survives the storm. Although his “reality-testing” ends in self-annihilation, he succeeds insofar as he engineers his own consciousness, which is not only a symbolic act, but also a performative enactment, of escape from the “ultimate horror” Hayles cites. And perhaps he even glimpses, if only for a brief moment,

“radio receiver, uniquely open to signals in a spiritual aether.” It also speaks to Gordon Pask’s “hankering” that “minds are somehow embedded in an all-pervasive communicational medium.” In the context of closing lines of “The Electric Ant,” it is worth noting that it was alternately termed “aether wind.”

reality from outside of his ontological and narrative frame. Ultimate hope within ultimate horror.

So, “The Electric Ant” accomplishes New Wave SF’s purpose, which according to Dick is making “what would otherwise be an intellectual abstraction concrete” (“A Brief Interview” 44). Dick transforms discursive philosophy into speculative fiction to “psychologically...cut the reader loose from the actual world that he inhabits,” which deconstructs “time, space, and reality” (45). If New Wave SF metaphorically opens up readers by disassembling ontological categories of cognition, drugs literally hook into users through physically disturbing those same cognitive conventions. In other words, altering one’s sensory system, or in Poole’s case, adjusting one’s reality tape, represents a method for madness. Becoming physiologically, psychologically, or psychosomatically unhinged is desirable because unlike “deduction” and “induction,” which can only build from what’s already laid out,” “*abduction*” teleports us far-out onto unfamiliar grounds to begin anew (Shaviro 12, emphasis in original). Thus, while Darko Suvin identifies SF’s unique function as cognitive estrangement, I argue that drug use also induces an alternate form of affective or physiological estrangement. As Dick states, the drug user is baffling precisely because “he may display moods and feelings that to us can’t be accounted for” (“Quest for Reality” 173). And like Jose Munoz’s claims regarding queerness in *Cruising Utopia*, drug use is “essentially about the rejection of the here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world,” even if this dream or demand is half-articulated in the slurred speaking of a “solitary oddball” under the influence (Munoz 1, 3). Said differently, I contend that if drug users are blind, it is simply from staring into the sun, which marks a utopian desire to gain some “kind of transport or a reprieve from what Bloch called the ‘darkness of the lived instant’” (5). Locked into the closed horizon of everyday life in the “prison house” of the present, drugs can be therapeutically self-administered to ease the stranglehold of self and society. Noncognitive estrangement, I argue, has

a unique “ability to rewrite a larger map of everyday life” and “challenge the dominance of an affective world, a present, full of anxiousness and fear” (1, 25). In this way, the pleasure of substances has the potential to affectively reorient one’s outlook on reality, which may illuminate “a horizon of existence,” previously unfelt, and consequently, unthought (25). As Lilly discovered, even entombed in the out-and-out darkness of “a universe with no stars, no galaxies, no entities, no people, no other intelligences,” there is still the bioelectric glow of *virtual light* (*Cyclone* 47).

According to Suvin, SF must be literalized in the sense that the imagined world is accepted as having ontological status. This ontological materiality in SF is essential for a confrontation of norms to occur between the factual and fictional worlds. Analogously, if drug culture is to generate such a confrontation, the altered states must be elevated from the epistemological to the ontological order of things. This is why I argue that psychonaut drug practices are most able to manufacture forms of noncognitive estrangement that are deeply transformative. Indeed, the psychonautic practitioner is empowered by the reality of the hallucination, even if it seems self-contradicting, if any metamorphosing dialectic is to crossover the actual and illusory divides. The SF reader and the drug user must each take on the rules, terms, and conditions of the new reality before returning to their “zero-world” to process the experience (Suvin 88). This recalls Lilly’s discussion of what he calls “the absolute zero point” of inner space in the tank, which is “a reference point” to anchor exploration (*Cyclone* 47). Lilly describes how “this zero point” was a “reference place to which I could return,” which marked “a zero point of a vast coordinate system, leading in ‘n’ different dimensions, in ‘n’ different directions away from this point” (47). Another way to appreciate this real ontological investment in the unreal is by way of the theory of speculative materialism, which Quentin Meillassoux describes as involved with the attempt to gain “access to the absolute” (Moir 122). As a contemporary materialism, speculative materialism begins with the premise that

“material reality is all there is and therefore everything in the world, including the speculative philosopher and her thought, is material and real” (126-7). Thus, there is no transcendence, conceived as an outside to material reality from which to access the absolute, there is only immanence, conceived as an inside of material reality to which we can look for the absolute. In other words, according to Moir, “it is because matter is immanently speculative that it is possible to know the absolute, of which we are, not incidentally, part” (131). This immanence, it seems, has resonance with the psychonaut’s desire to explore inner space as the path to charting “ultimate notions” such as “being, the absolute, reality, matter, and so on” (125). In this way, the immanence of speculative materialism is related to the entheogenic use of psychoactive drugs to access the ultimate or generate the absolute from within oneself. So, speculative materialism combines a “reflective activity” on the absolute (the speculative) with “a *reflexive* one” (the materialist) (131). In other words, consciousness is a “form of material reality,” which is “able to reflect on material reality which thus reflects on itself” (138). This breaks with older ideas of Cartesian dualism, in which mind and matter are considered to be separate entities, immaterial and material respectively. If the immaterial does not exist, then the exploration of consciousness through altered states must be considered a material reality in need of excavation just as physical reality necessitates investigation. Moreover, speculative materialism troubles the division between subject/object relations, which resembles the way the psychonaut movement blurs of the boundaries between inner/outer spaces. According to Dick, “thingness is what we must get away from in regarding ourselves and in considering life. By more modern views we are overlapping fields, all of us, animals included, plants included” (“Man, Android, Machine” 223). The speculative materialist might reframe this claim to include all matter, rather than just what we consider alive, but the animating principle is strikingly similar. For instance, Dick says that each of us “partakes in the

cosmos” precisely because the cosmos is “immanent in matter,” and what is immanent in the physical world must be accessible to us in various ways (“Man, Android, Machine” 223; Moir 132). From this perspective, it becomes clear that speculative materialism, like my reading of “The Electric Ant,” is invested in the utopian and “radical possibility immanent in matter” and “the fundamental maxim that anything is possible,” even if it is “neither certain or necessary” (Moir 132, 136). Likewise, Dick sees drug use, mental illness, and hallucination as ways to manifest this radical possibility latent in material reality because it is “the sane man [who] does not know that everything is possible” (“Quest” 174). From this perspective, it is conceivable to read drug use and “hallucination” as a method of accessing a “parallel world on the vertical axis” of ontology, similar to the “SF motif of ‘paraspace’: parallel worlds, [and] other ‘dimensions’” (McHale 252).

Furthermore, drug use can be read as a form of estrangement that allows one to become ‘the other’ who is also one’s ‘self.’ For example, in an interview, Lilly describes an acid-induced hallucination in which a few extraterrestrial or interdimensional entities showed him the “Big Bang that they created three times” (“Alternity and Beyond” 4). These beings pointed out the moment when humans appeared and disappeared, to which he replied, “That’s awful! What happens to them?” (4). Their response was, “That’s us,” which caused Lilly to fall into a depression because he couldn’t “identify with that”; but, after about a week of contemplation, he “suddenly realized they [were] also talking about me” (4). This account demonstrates a dialectical movement between the hallucinatory and real world. Particularly important is the way that the self/other relationship is complicated, rather than collapsed, through the destabilization of the individual ego and identity. Lilly does not “become other” so much as he gains the understanding that what appears as “other” is also what appears as “self.” In other words, the perceived distinction between self/other remains intact, while still revealed as perceptual illusion. However, the explorations of such stabilizing

illusions have value, because they allow the widening of the reality tunnel through a range of experiences and perspectives. Lilly says, “It’s like becoming a cat or something, to find out what’s going on with the cat” (8).⁴⁷ Reading psychonautic drug practices as self-estrangement is found in Lilly’s out-of-self experience of becoming “part of a huge consciousness...[which] wasn’t me. My ego afterwards wanted it to be me of course but it wasn’t” (8). Or, Was it? No. But Yes! u Know?

Again, it is important to emphasize that for drug enthusiasts, like Dick, the ‘manufactured’ reality has real ontological status as an existing world, which overlays or lies tangential across our own reality. Unlike SF, which imagines a possible world with ontological status, drug use is usually seen as exposing an invisible aspect of our own world, which may appear in a domain not usually perceptible to us, but which is nevertheless as real as anything else. In fact, the general consensus of these drug artists is that these estranging experiences are somehow *more real* than the baseline reality lets on. So, one could argue that psychonaut practitioners are more seriously invested in the “ultimate reality” exposed by drug practices than SF authors/readers are in the various “alternate realit[ies]” created in SF (“Electric Ant” 112; Suvin 88). As Suvin maintains, “SF does not posit another superordinated and ‘more real’ reality but an alternative on the same ontological level as the author’s empirical reality” (88). In this reading, traditional SF readers do not experience something above and beyond (or beneath and below) the everyday but a version of the everyday that is categorically (or cognitively) not their own. Psychonaut drug users, conversely, experience something felt to be above and beyond (or beneath and below) the everyday while also *realizing* a version of the everyday that is absolutely (and affectively) their own. In “The Electric Ant,” these two strategies cross in a new way that combines the cognitive aspect of traditional world-building (extrapolation, literalization, objectivism) with the aesthetics of New Wave poetics (speculation,

⁴⁷ Obviously, the “cat” comment here shows that Lilly was not familiar with Thomas Nagel’s famous essay on what has been termed in philosophy of mind as the general unspeakability of qualia: “What Is It Like To Be A Bat?” (1974).

psychologization, subjectivism). Having delineated some of the distinctions between these two strategies of estrangement, it is worth noting that upon closer examination, the apparent line between them begins to waver. Undoubtedly, the *cognitive estrangement* of SF has a secondary effect of *feeling* differently; just as the *noncognitive estrangement* of drug use has a secondary effect of *thinking* differently. After a fictional trip one processes feelings from cerebral experience, after a hallucinatory trip one processes thinking on corporeal experience. *Thinking is sensualized.*

A Scanner Darkly (1977)

Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean someone's not out to get you
(Dick, 1974: 343).

I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity' ... in *Direct* recording of certain areas of psychic process I may have limited function...
(Burroughs, 1959: 343).

Philip K. Dick's novel, *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), documents continuities and ruptures with New Wave SF as well as in its relation to 1960s drug culture. Jameson argues that Modernism can be understood in "concepts such as anxiety and alienation," whereas postmodernism is defined by the "notorious cases of burnout and self-destruction of the ending 1960s, and the great dominant experiences of drugs and schizophrenia" (*Cultural Logic* 14). Published in 1977, Dick's dystopian text shows the gradual disillusionment in the alternative social, spiritual, and political orientations of 1960s America. The utopian hope of the previous decade was marred by a "series of scandals that began mid-decade and spilled into the seventies—communes that failed, charismatic leaders who turned psychotic, cults that ended in crime and murder" (Paglia 63). Two decades of heavy drug use left former psychonaut in the deep waters of addiction, psychosis, overdose, and death. Dick's builds from this setting, creating a world where the deviant counterculture has been heavily criminalized and subjected to intense surveillance by a police state. Still, Dick adds a twist to this

relatively routine depiction as private companies have coopted the counterculture by cornering the market. Producers of a fictionalized drug—an addictive psychoactive narcotic—are monopolistic corporations, which control distribution and detainment of populations addicted to Substance D, or “Slow Death” (*Scanner* 26).⁴⁸ The historical and literary period also situates *Scanner* between New Wave or “Modernist” science fiction and paranoid or “postmodernist” fiction, partly because of the central role criminal culture and conspiracy theory play in the novel. Conspiracy culture “dates back to the political turmoil of the 1960s in general,” which undoubtedly contributed to the aesthetic of “high-tech paranoia” of *Scanner* (Knight 22; *Cultural Logic* 38). Although Dick’s holographic scanners are a relatively weak novum, they are “typical SF extrapolated technology,” which intensify aspects of modernist “literary perspectivism” while extending the postmodernist motif of hyper surveillance found in paranoid fiction (McHale 260). Certainly, the undercover operation, in which Arctor, “the heavy dope suspect,” invents a “pretext to slip down the street and into the apartment” where “Fred replay[s] miles and miles of tape to see what” he, Arctor, has been up to, reads more like postmodernist anti-detective fiction than science fiction (*Scanner* 108).⁴⁹ *Scanner* provides a bridge that connects my analysis of postmodernity, drug culture, and science fiction within a single text. Written towards the end of the New Wave period, it documents the transition from earlier SF texts, which ask, “Which world is this?”, to the “corollary question,

⁴⁸ Dick’s set up, although exaggerated in scope, recalls Burroughs’s introduction to *Naked Lunch* (1954), which says: “Junk is the ideal product...the ultimate merchandise...The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to his product. He does not improve and simplify the merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client” (3-4). In another way, this can be applied to capitalism in general, especially to McLuhan’s idea which is that we don’t design products for consumers but consumers for products. In *Take Today* (1972), a more utopic view is expressed, which posits that new electronic technologies might allow the consumer to also become a producer (4). *Scanner* takes this utopian idea of consumer-turned-producer and literalizes a dystopic version in New Path’s rehab, where former Substance-D addicts work in agricultural production of Substance-D. Big Pharm now puns as Big Farm.

⁴⁹ The bureaucratic error that leads to Arctor’s investigation of himself, or Fred’s investigation of Arctor, resembles the darkly absurdist humor of postmodernist fiction. Paul Auster’s anti-detective novel, *City of Glass* (1985), shows a thematic and stylistic similarity. The use of metafiction is subtler in *Scanner*; still, after a confusing scene of Fred watching Arctor on the holoscanners, Fred says, “I never will get used to this job... You can make book on that” (181).

‘Which of my selves?’” (McHale 254). Arctor, I argue, anticipates the cyberpunk interest in the multiverse and fulfills the postmodernist model of “alternate selves” when he asks, “*How many Bob Arctors are there? ... Which of them is me?*” (McHale 254; *Scanner* 99, emphasis in original). In this way, *Scanner* departs from some of the more genre specific elements of SF, which McHale argues “appeared to evade the consequences of its ontological pluralism and experimentalism for its model of the self” (254). The genre of SF keeps characterization “strictly subordinated to the foreground category of ‘world’”; however, Dick subverts this convention by giving primacy to his portrayal of Arctor as a fractured individual whose sense of self is “self-contradictory, hypothetical or fictional, [and] infiltrated by other realities” (254). So, the psychological realism of Arctor’s characterization reflects a more Modernist sensibility, while its “centrifugal tendencies” comport with postmodernist representations of the self as “plural, unstable, and problematic” (254, 253). But unlike postmodernist texts, which “represent the disintegration of self figuratively, through linguistic, structural, or visual metaphors,” *Scanner* represents the Arctor’s fragmentation literally when the left and right hemispheres of his brain become unable to communicate (254).⁵⁰ The initial split of “Arctor-Fred-Whatever-Godknew” is precipitated by Arctor’s undercover work as Agent Fred (*Scanner* 27). Although Arctor often has “a strange feeling as to who he was” and where “the act end[s],” the first doubling of Arctor-Fred can be read “metaphorically (psychologically)” as an

⁵⁰ Dick’s version of the “literal disintegrative experience” is also distinct from what McHale theorizes cyberpunk SF as doing differently than other postmodernist fiction. The *literalness* is what distinguishes cyberpunk SF to McHale. Whereas the *extremeness* distinguishes postmodernist fiction. *Scanner* draws from Modernist techniques in addition to using very postmodernist strategies. It also employs postmodernist practices of representing this disintegration of self *metaphorically* in addition to the “cyberpunk practice” of representing it *literally*. This mixing of literary genres, movements, and styles is thoroughly New Wave. The “literal disintegrative experience” is psychological and literal. The division, which was always at least somewhat artificial, is overcome in *Scanner* with the fictional Substance D and the real split-brain experiments. A comparison might be drawn to Samuel R. Delany’s novel, *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (1984), and its “radical anxiety termination” procedure that reads like a lobotomy and turns its recipients into a new class of enslaved people with cognitive deficits who use the acronym “R.A.T.” as an identifying moniker (e.g., RAT Korga). The “RAT” designation mirrors the “ant” epithet used for androids and late-stage addicts in Dick’s drug narratives. The literal and psychological collide in futuristic settings of self-hacking and being hacked.

epistemological problem (*Scanner* 27; McHale 254). This is a recognizable narrative strategy “inherited from modernist poetics,” which is unsurprising since the New Wave is considered to be “SF’s own modernist generation” (McHale 259). Yet, Dick further modifies and extends the Modernist convention, associated with New Wave of the 1960s, into postmodern form, arguably prefiguring some aspects of cyberpunk SF of the 1980s. This connection become more apparent following the second split from Arctor into Bruce, which pushes toward cyberpunk’s literal bodily fragmentation that is nevertheless psychologized. The final rupture results from prolonged abuse of Substance D, which causes a physical break between the left and right hemisphere of the brain, connected by “an isthmus of nerve tissue called the corpus callosum” (*Scanner* 125). Drugs trigger McHale’s “literal disintegrative experience,” which, “not at all metaphorically (psychologically), but ontologically,” shatters the “centered, centripetal self upon which modernist perspectivism rests” (254, 260). I argue that drugs are a New Wave mode of “prosthetic augmentation” that offer “an exhilarating expansion of self,” but at the risk of “an identity-threatening dilution or attenuation,” in which “the human self may be entirely absorbed into the machine” (256, 257). Although McHale is referring to cyberpunk SF and real machines, this analysis applies at least metaphorically to *Scanner*, which employs technological language in describing the parallel function of neurobiological systems. The psychologists who monitor Fred compare the left hemisphere to a “digital computer; the right to an analogic” (*Scanner* 217). The left hemisphere is said to house the “self-system or ego, or consciousness,” while the right hemisphere is largely unknown and “will need study for many years to come” (217, 118).⁵¹ This appraisal clarifies how

⁵¹ It is worth noting that the specific language used by the psychologists in *Scanner* is used almost verbatim by Dick in his nonfictional essay, “Man, Android, and Machine” (1976), in which he cites Robert Ornstein’s work in relation to the split-brain experiments (220-221). Dick doesn’t refer to Ornstein specifically in the novel, but these experiments were a primary source for *Scanner*. The novel does cite from an Ornstein anthology: “The Split Brain in Man” (1967) by Michael S. Gazzaniga, as well as “The Other Side of the Brain: An Appositional Mind” (1969) by Joseph E. Bogen.

drug use in the novel can be seen as a prefiguration of cyberpunk “self-hacking.”⁵² One line has a
 anesthetic poetic: “Anybody got any dope? Where there's dope there's hope” (97). How audacious.

mind-bending genre-blending: surveillance sf

I think drugs are interesting...as chemical means of altering what we call
 reality, which I would define as a more or less constant scanning pattern....
 (Burroughs, 1965: 36).

Discussing *Scanner* in the context of the surveillance in dystopian fiction, Wood notes that
 in one “1956 short story, ‘The Dead Past,’ Asimov portrays naive university researchers acting for
 academic freedom against perceived stifling state control [who] unwittingly [end up] unleashing a
 device, the ‘chronoscope,’ on the world that will end personal privacy”; however, he fails to notice
 that Dick directly responds to this Asimov story with his invention of the “cephalochromosome”
 (Wood 47; *Scanner* 30). Asimov’s “chronoscope” is a time-viewing device used to audit the past,
 which although more far-fetched, is comparable to Dick’s “holoscanners” in that as they are both
 surveillance technologies in SF (as Wood argues); the “cephalochromosome” (not cited in Wood)

⁵² The nuance here signals a socially and historically relevant gap in the criticism. As David Murakami Wood argues:

One major weakness of social science consideration of SF has been its focus either on ‘classic’ mainstream
 SF, or on ‘cyberpunk’ (and after) and its neglect of almost everything else in the genre. Following analysts
 like Jameson (1991) it has become *almost received wisdom that cyberpunk is exceptional because of its*
understanding of late capitalism and postmodernity. In the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (ESF), Peter
 Nicholls makes it...clear that New Wave writers have far more in common with what is generally recognized
 as postmodernist within literary criticism (Nicholls, 1999). If [we are to] accept Brian McHale’s view that
 postmodernist fiction is fundamentally about the move from epistemology to ontology, from knowing to
 being (McHale, 1987), then the New Wave writers were the vanguard of postmodern writing in SF. The New
 Wave however was also genuinely bleak and often profoundly ironic in a way that cyberpunk generally was
 not. *New Wave SF literature anticipates many of the themes later credited to cyberpunk and does so with far*
more overt and cynical politics” (48, emphasis mine).

While an apt description of the uneven attention given to pre-New Wave and post-New Wave SF in the field of SFS,
 it fails to account for this historical, literary, and generic importance of the period its pushing. New Wave themes are
 distinct from cyberpunk that have gone uncredited in readings hyper focused on the “understanding of late capitalism
 and postmodernity.” It also seems remiss to suggest that the New Wavers are simply “bleak,” “ironic,” and “cynical”
 in actual cases of their “more...overt politics”; some of the political edge of the New Wave is blunted by say, Zelazny’s
 story (I’ll get to this next chapter), but the period also saw a revival of utopian writing, radical practices, and protest
 movements. Its oblique aesthetic is also an affective technique. Self-hacking is about breaking social, perceptual, and
 linguistic codes in New Wave SF (and its contemporary post-New Wave heirs), not just for characters, but for *readers*.

is a sort of technological toy and Arctor's most prized possession (the "cephscope" is not only a portmanteau but a pun on Asimov's "chronoscope" and ultimately on Bakhtin's "chronotope").⁵³ Mentioned thirty-or-so times in *Scanner*, the neologism combines "cephalo" (i.e., "relating to the brain or head") and "chromoscope" (i.e., "an optical instrument for combining colored images"), and so is presumably a kind of Burroughsian 'flicker' like brainwave color projection device.⁵⁴ As Donna allusively relays to Arctor, inviting readers to reckon with what this understated yet also talked-up speculative technology might be used for (or look like) for themselves,⁵⁵

Your cephalochromoscope that cost you nine hundred dollars, that you always turn on and play when you get home—Ernie and Barris were babbling away about it. They tried to use it today and it wouldn't work. No colors and no ceph patterns, neither one (*Scanner* 30).

This information causes Arctor to immediately head home to see what the trouble with it is before anyone else can mess it more up by "tinkering with it" (30). This appears to be an unnoticed novum more in the New Age-New Wave style that Burroughs for one envisioned as a liberating alternative to the proliferation of repressive technologies. 'Flicker,' of course, is a 'stroboscopic' machine and prototype of the 'dreamachine' created by Brion Gysin and popularized in the cultural imaginary by Burroughs.⁵⁶ The device was meant to create what Gysin described as a "transcendental storm of color visions" and "overwhelming flood of intensely bright patterns in supernatural colors"

⁵³ The portmanteau is an example of left-brain function (most parts of language are left-lateralized); however, the pun is an example of a right-brain follow-up function (some parts of language are right-lateralized). Examples include: double-meanings, sound-spelling cues, dream-driven words, literal-nonliteral usage, or intonation-inflection patterns.

⁵⁴ Dick's "cephalochromoscope" likely refers to the electroencephalogram (EEG) as an early biofeedback device that measured electrical activity in the brain. The EEG was likewise an inspiration for Gysin and Burroughs's 'flicker.' Another "cephscope" source might be the 19th century instrument called a "nephoscope" used for "observing clouds."

⁵⁵ A chromoscopic vision flashes up brilliantly across the mind as lightning before the colors fade into the greyscale monochrome of a sad cephalo. Nine nimbus clouds appeared. Noös from nowhere? *A pun, what harmless fun, she...* A noose from the trees drops down before her. *Then, for no reason, no real reason*, another nine now covered in bees. The rain drops wept. The waves swept her upward. She floated on her back. Nine ropes swirled about her in whirling rings. Bees in the water. Some goblin child had been crying all night. Nine goblets of goblin tears all from one child.

⁵⁶ "The Brian Hack" (2015), a short film, represents a more contemporary version of inducing a "God-experience" which is made available to the masses through geometric patterns of stroboscopic light paired with an adrenalin rush.

which “exploded...[in] a multidimensional kaleidoscope whirling out through space...swept out of time” (*Brion Gysin: Here to Go* 141). In essence the technological invention was designed to simulate a drug or hallucinatory experience without the chemical compound more often used for such visions. Dick’s fictional version of this real cybernetic device creates a stark contrast when juxtaposed with the *holoscanners* (a scanner darkly) because the *cephalochromosome* (colorful neural patterns) is the opposite in terms of a technological novum. While the holoscanners have been attended to in relation to surveillance SF and postmodern dystopias, I suggest that the cephalochromosome has not been given the attention it deserves. Throughout the novel’s entirety, a half-cocked conspiracy theory is continually rehashed concerning the *senseless* sabotage of Arctor’s “cephscope,” which is described as “an incredibly expensive and valued cephscope that everyone in the house, plus all their friends, loved and enjoyed”; and as “his cephalochromosome, around which he had built the pleasure part of his schedule, the segment of the day in which they all relaxed and got mellow” (53). In another section: “Bob always really got off on this Altec cephscope; I musta seen him put it on...every time as soon as he gets home from work at night, soon as he steps in the door. Every guy has one thing he treasures. This was his” (38). When the holoscanners are installed in Arctor’s house, this experience changes: “immediately he felt something watching: the holo-scanners on him. As soon as he crossed his own threshold...the scanners, insidious and invisible, that watched him and recorded (152). He realizes: “Whatever it is that’s watching, it is not a human. Not by my standards, anyhow. Not what I’d recognize” (153).⁵⁷

And unlike his beloved cephscope, “Once the holo-scanners were mounted in place, he ruminated,

⁵⁷ What is watching, of course, is not just the holoscanner technology but the people who are tasked with surveillance operations, such as Fred himself. This complicates readings of the “authentically human” as equivalent with “cognitive function” which has not been compromised by prolonged drug abuse (i.e., readings of “Fred” as more “human” than “Bruce,” which is more often sidestepped in readings of “Arctor”). What human ‘functions’ are lost in this conformity to the societal, ideological, and political imperatives? To the strictures of what is the left-brain’s optimal functioning?

there would be very little sabotage or attacks. Or anyhow successful sabotage or successful attacks” (73). He asks himself, “What does a scanner see? I mean, really see? Into the head? Down into the heart? Does a passive infrared scanner...or a cube-type holo-scanner...see into me—into us—clearly or darkly?” (153). The cephscope, of course, doesn’t ‘see’ clearly or darkly but *colorfully*. It is something *to* see that ‘sees’ in the sense of viewing one’s own and one another’s brainwave patterns for purposes of leisure (pleasure) rather than policing (power). Recreation as opposed to reconnaissance. It is *the other side* of a scanner darkly, more like a projection *brightly*.

Dick’s twin technological novums, if taken metaphorically, as representations/elaborations of right/left hemisphere ‘functions,’ appear not as ‘weak’ cyberpunk extrapolative technologies, but as hard-wearing New Wave interfacing ‘devices’—*literally, laterally, and literarily*.⁵⁸ I argue that re-reading the left-brain (scanners) and right-brain (cephscopes) as ‘tech’ appears as a *function* of the novel’s *form*, but our reading of it—as literal in one direction, as laterally disconnected, and as literarily about state surveillance—is symptomatic of the strong societal and literary pull toward left-brain readings as involuntary *ways of seeing*. As Iain McGilchrist, a cognitive neuroscientist, explains in his, “Can the divided brain tell us anything about the ultimate nature of reality?” (2011), this left-brain bias has inbuilt *blind sites* we never “see” (so we cannot “tell” anything of their “real nature” or even that anything *is* out-of-sight). Still, in a *sense*, “insight” is necessarily a *blindsight*. But *not seeing the interface*—linguistic, perceptual, fictional, conceptual—is *seeing transparency* where “clearly” nothing of the sort is there. The left and right-side of the brain interface with reality differently—each relational style alters the type, kind, and object of attention (and its attenuation).

⁵⁸ In sewing, interfacing is a textile sewn on the *wrong side* of the fabric (the unseen interior of the facing) to give a shape, structure, or support *from within* the exterior without being seen. In media technologies and computer science, an interface enables the connection, interaction, or communication between what are otherwise independent systems. Both of these meanings—an *interface* or *interfacing*—refer to a surface that forms a common boundary or connection point between entities and that structures the relation in ways not readily apparent from the outside or inside of its use (e.g., collar interfacing, user interface). Being on the *right side* of a facing or interface means not to see it—but rather to see or move *through it*. It is what sets *your* sights, so to speak, and determines the fixed and fluid range of movement.

What do we know about the hemisphere differences? The first thing...is that they seem to underwrite different kinds of attention...[It is] not just another ‘cognitive function.’ It’s nothing less than the way in which we relate to the world. And it doesn’t just dictate the *kind* of relationship we have with whatever it is: it dictates *what it is that we come to have a relationship with*. In fact, though...what it is we are attending to determines the type of attention we pay...the type of attention we pay determines *what it is we see* (4-5, emphasis in original).

The left-brain readings of *Scanner* that dominate the literary criticism on the novel reproduce the “visions” and “erasures” of the holoscanners themselves (Hayles 27). The scanners appear only to disappear from the literary analysis of *Scanner* as a Kafkaesque dystopia of high-tech surveillance. The extent of critical attention they receive is enough to conduct readings which are based *around them* but without a close-reading of *them* in the novel, particularly *in relation to its other novums*. The singular focus on paranoid, postmodernist, and proto-cyberpunk truisms is a type of narrow literary attention with less social and political reach than we as the cultural critics of late capitalism seem to assume. The lens we apply to our readings of SF determines what it is that we see, but it is not necessarily reflective of what is there. The scanners “see” but as Arctor points out, what they “see” is nothing but surface. Surface extended into a set of multiple surfaces; surface as far as it is wide but with no depth—empty reflections, depthless relations.⁵⁹ In 1975, anticipating the lines of *Scanner*, Dick speaks to this as a problematic: “In neither case can we go on surface appearance;

⁵⁹ Jameson somewhere compares postmodernity to a “set of multiple surfaces,” because it hasn’t any “depth-models.” The new “holographic scanners” that replace the older model “passive infrared scanners” might be read as a confusing technical response but with humor at the level of practical effects if one follows it through to apply extrapolative SF’s reading method to Dick’s novel and its speculative world-building. The only real difference between these new “depth-model” “holoscanners” and the older “scanners” as far as the technical production is that they are “holographic”; the television of overly familiar 2D kind (still mildly interesting) is now a weirdly tedious 3D hologram (somehow wildly uninteresting). What should catch our interest is that it seems neither terribly estranging nor really imaginable. At least not in miniature form when compared to our own visual and spatial perception that takes place in real-time with life-size persons of interest. This should be—and in fact was—what brought the title back into play as a structuring biblical allusion/bodily illusion. The holoscanners are patently absurd as an extrapolative novum until they are speculatively *pulled-back-through-the-body-as-interface*. The “tech” reflects our own percept-system back up at us reversed again. Extrapolative “tech” (left-brain) turns out to serve the *other* functional dominant as a *speculative modem* (right-brain); the extrapolative “tech” (digital scanners, literal devices, left-brain) is data effectively converted in Dick’s construction of a fictional model of a speculative “modem” (analog symbols, literary devices, right-brain). New Wave SF dials-up.

we must penetrate to the heart of each, to the heart of the subject” (“Man, Android, Machine” 212). Then, citing a fragment of Heraclitus, Dick gives what I position as a reading directive to find the deeper rhythm that is the heart of *Scanner*: “Latent structure is master of obvious structure” (212). In *The Master and His Emissary* (2009), McGilchrist concludes that while the left-brain *thinks* of itself as “master,” it is the so-called “emissary” of the right-brain to which this honorific title more accurately *applies*. So, the left-brain is “obvious structure” and the right-brain is “latent structure.” McGilchrist argues that left-brain dominance over its Other (right-brain) half correlates to Western world domination of the Other (Eastern) counterpart. Similarly, Dick relays the artificial division and its contemporary consequences as follows: “we as a species are prone to reside entirely within one hemisphere only,” but really each one “receives exactly the same input as the other...working by comparing patterns” (212). He continues: “Processing the identical information each may arrive at a totally different result,” so “if the right brain finds something *vital* which we to its left remain unaware of,” it must be communicated *obliquely* (212, emphasis mine). The idea of the right-brain finding something “*vital*” relates to a later section in the essay on philosopher Henri Bergson’s theories of time—though Vitalism is not brought up directly, he implicitly cites it in this passage—interestingly, it also articulates Dick’s New Wave SF to the legacy of British Modernism because of how influential Bergson’s thinking was for this specific branch of the wider literary movement. While aspects of Dick’s SF have an almost conspicuously American style (or brand) that goes back to the specific history of American pulp writing, his attention to the inner workings of psychology, the nature of reality and philosophy of time, and the immanence of mind in matter are more aligned with the precise theoretical orientations and critical attachments of the British Modernists. This is worth noting because of how thoroughly postmodernist much if not all of Dick’s SF is thought of as being, and because of the different trajectory that some American SF took instead of what was

in Britain ‘the New Wave’ of SF in the style of British Modernists—toward interplanetary fantasy, in Ballard’s terms, or what Moylan theorizes as critical utopias in the American 1960s and 1970s.

The description of Arctor’s “cephalochromosome” as his “treasure” also finds a conceptual cross cue in the same nonfiction essay which supports reading the “cephscope” as an analogy for the right-brain (and by extension suggests reading the “scanners” as an analogy for the left-brain):

“[we] reside...[in] one hemisphere [left], leaving *the other* [right] to do what it what it must to protect us, and to protect the world. *Keep in mind that this protectiveness is bilateral*, an exchange between the world and each of us: *each of us is a treasure*, to be cherished and preserved, but so is the world and the hidden seeds in it, slumbering. *The other* hidden seeds” (212, emphasis mine).

The bilateral language shifts between the right and left hemisphere of the brain and the brain in relation to the larger world because cybernetics puts the organism *in relation* to its environment. This positioning of the intersubjective (self) and outer objective (world) in an open circuit aligns with McHale’s theory of postmodernist fiction but in a distinctive way that only a New Age-assemblage (to pick up on Pickering’s phrasing) or New Wave-formation (as theorized in Hayles’s textual archive)—one which includes in its critical articulation the history of cybernetics—could “think” to encompass adequately (and provisionally). Dick says, “*through*...[the] right hemisphere of each of us, we are kept ignorant of what we must be ignorant of *now*. But that time is ending; *that winter is melting*, along with its terrors, its tyrannies and *snow*” (212, emphasis mine). Dick’s seasonal metaphor takes its cue from Bergson’s views on cyclical time, now applied to a reading of the human species; the cephscope (the right-brain) is a treasure and sign of all of the right-brain functions that have been overlooked, unnoticed, and unattended to in our readings of the novel and our own history. It is a signal in the noise of what is preserved and protected both in us and the world and what should be cherished and treasured in a world no longer hostile to the right-brain. McGilchrist adds to a right-brain reading of the “cephscope” as 1) a New Wave literalization that

views *the right-brain as 'tech'* (the brand of the cephscope is “Altec” as in “all tech-nology”) and 2) *cybernetic trance device* (like ‘flicker’ in which the ‘tech’ is that of the “*decentered self*”) as in Pickering’s “*ontology-in-action*” that draws on “the cybernetic, performative brain” (right-brain):

And the bump *at the front on the right in humans*...is associated with a whole array of ‘*functions*’ that distinguish us from other animals, and *relate to our capacity for empathy: in intimate connection with the right hemisphere as a whole*, it plays a significant part in imagination, creativity, *the capacity for religious awe, music, dance, poetry, art, love of nature, a moral sense, a sense of humour and the ability to change our minds* (“Divided Brain” 6, emphasis mine).

These capacities in the brain we want *to tap into*; the infinite ones that give us what we take out. Dick seems to suggest that when we return to the right-brain, when it is again safe to be exposed to a left-brain, what has been hidden from us will be once again revealed. The warmth of the spring and melting of the snow will allow “the hidden seeds” (in ourselves) and “the other hidden seeds” (in the world) to grow—the word-soil of the living brain and the world-soul of the living matter that is the mind-spirit of the larger organism. Like in birds, McGilchrist says, the “right eye (left hemisphere)” is “narrowly focused on what we are [doing],” while “keeping the left eye (right hemisphere) open for predators” (imagine a strange bird of the human species whose left hemisphere *is* also a predator from which the right hemisphere must protect itself in addition to everything else); he continues, “at the same time, [we] use [our] left eye (right hemisphere) in forming bonds with others of [our] kind” (“Divided Brain” 6). Then, clarifying the misevaluation of the relative importance of these two parts of ourselves and their role in mediating our relationship with the larger world as well as with everything in it, he says,

it seems that the left hemisphere specialises in a sort of piecemeal attention that helps us make use of the world, but in doing so it alters our relationship with it. Equally the right hemisphere subserves a broad open attention which enables us to see ourselves connected to – and in the human case, to empathise with – whatever is other than ourselves (6).

The right-brain reading of the novel's novums is one that necessarily reads the parts in relation to the whole. The "scanners" alone cannot see the thematic core of the concepts therein because they lack a double valence; the word "surveillance" is relevant here because 'sur' ('over') and 'veil' ('cover') also suggest the opposite of their assumed meaning and technical function of the word. The blanket surveillance *covers over* what it intends to expose; it is yet another cover ('veil') laid over ('sur') the top of what the apparatus 'means' to lay bare. The double valence of "scanners" (negative) and "cephscope" (positive) as complementary metaphors of lateralized brain functions is an added dimension to Dick's speculative technologies that dramatize these dual and dueling potentials in ourselves and our technologies. The "scanners" alone double down on their perceived function of "surveillance" (a double negative in terms of the 'valence' which is now 'veillance'), to which the left hemisphere is blinded by its own perceived powers of sight. The right hemisphere is the part that looks to the (w)hole in the citational practices in the novel and on the novel to 'see' something different. The right-brain is wary of predators and it is what we use to bond with people; this is a double valence in which the former (negative) has begun to prey upon the latter (positive). The left-brain is predatory and sees the world in the ways in which it can be made use of by itself, it is instrumentalized by the instrumentalizing nature of the instrument that attends to it. The world and the people in it are further objectified through a technological orientation toward the world in which the left-brain's *ways of seeing* are naturalized as 'right'—what Heidegger calls "enframing."

I propose this broad view of the *cephalochromosome* as an unexamined alternative to the narrow *ways of seeing* offered by the novel's paranoid technological novum of the *holoscanners* and suggest it forms the reparative half of a metaphoric novum network. The external surveillance conducted by invisible police scanners is a notable inversion of the projection of inner space states enjoyed in a shared social setting. Typically, a scan is in black and white; the cephscope readings

are in color. The surveillance and projection technologies correspond to the left digital brain and the right analog brain. Or, to cognition (the cold equations) and affect (the hot passions). Bergson's terminology would be intellect and intuition. They correspond to fears and fantasies of ourselves, of each other, and of technology's role in mediating that set of social experiences. If we extend the metaphor, the left hemisphere processes information by translating it into discrete, quantifiable representations (the binary format of digital computers—like the black and white of a scanner), whereas the right hemisphere manages fluctuating data by converting it into electrical pulses (the amplitude band of analog computers—like the color spectrum and brain waves). The inclusion of the second novum makes what seems like a proto-cyberpunk text take on qualities of the New Wave. The scanners and cephscope also parallel the scramblesuit and Substance D, respectively. These are the only four truly science fictional elements (or novums) of the text. The scanners and scramblesuit represent modes of state surveillance to the cephscope and Substance D's social subversion as differently oriented responses to postmodern technoculture. When in his scramble suit doing "his reporting thing, [Arctor] experienced a certain deep change in himself"; [He] became neutral...spoke in a neutral fashion...looked neutral...And then afterward all his feelings seeped back" (47). This motif of affect associated with color is again emphasized with the language "he'd discuss...without feeling" because "This was Fred," but later when out of the scramblesuit as Arctor "the terrible colors seeped back in" (48). Likewise, there was none of the "usual warmth, the usual arousal...no anger, no love, no strong emotions of any sort" because in "the scramble suits...they could not physically sense each other" and because of "the situation itself," for "professional reasons" (47, 48). There was no "natural involvement" in the scramblesuit; "theoretically, he could describe anything he had witnessed in an impassive way...if he had observed that or knew it for a fact" (48). This language of witnessing and reporting in an

“impassive” way echoes that of the “passive infrared scanners” (48). The secrecy of the state, the suppression of the self, and the absence of the senses dramatized and literalized in *the censors of the scramblesuits* replicate and reverse in *the sensors of the scanners* to violate the privacy of others, vicariously enter their social space, and voyeur with the virtual presence of extended senses. The outward-facing, inward-effacing effects of the scanners and scramblesuits form a conceptual counterweight to the inward-facing, outward-interfacing properties of the cephalochromosome and Substance D. Scramblesuits obscure individual identity from an external position to withhold information from others while limiting one’s other senses; Substance D allocates social identity and alters perception from an internal position to sublimate pain into something that at least at one time approximated pleasure. The scramblesuits like the holoscanners are pure cognition while Substance D and the cephscope are cut with affect. This rather cursory reading shows that what may appear to be weak technological novums in relation to cyberpunk have throughlines to the New Wave in their allegorical relation to the human brain (and to New Age technologies of altered states like ‘flicker’). The cephalochromosome alludes to and alters a paranoid novum of another work of surveillance SF but in a reparative way that forces a reexamination of how the critical scholarship on *Scanner* has categorized the novel. Examining the four novums of Dick’s novel together instead of focusing only on the paranoid aspects of the scanners, scramblesuits, and even Substance D, however briefly, allows for another reading to emerge with thematic, symbolic, and metaphorical dimensions that have gone unremarked upon in the almost exclusively paranoid readings of the novel. Attending to the cephalochromosome, even momentarily, exposes precisely what the holoscanners obscure, a New Wave sensibility hidden in the latent structure of the novel. To repurpose the famous scene about the ten-speed bike, the psychologist explains how Arctor and his friends misunderstood because right and left-brain “inputs are distorting in such a fashion that

when you go to reason about what you see you reason wrongly because you don't..."; Fred says, "But a ten-speed bike has five in back...seven gears. What we saw was accurate. Two in front," to which the psychologist replies, "*But you didn't perceive...how they interact*" (98, emphasis mine). Explicating the encounter in which the man who'd sold them the bike tried explaining it, he says:

'What [that man] saw,' the [psychologist] said, 'was different from what all of you saw. *He saw two separate connecting lines between the rear gear system and the front, two simultaneous different lines perceptible to him between the gears in front running to each of the five back ones in turn.* What you saw was one connective to all back ones. Which is inaccurate perception. Nobody taught [him] that; what they taught him to do, if anyone taught him at all, was to figure out, *cognitively*, what *the meaning of those two connectives* were. *You missed one of them entirely, all of you.*' (98, emphasis mine)

narrowing the parameters of paranoia: drug discourse

Then I felt the touch of a higher power and I became a morphine addict. Best thing I ever did for myself. Without God's Own Medicine I could well have ended up one of those 'Write the Great American Novel' [types] that never get off the ground, or an alcoholic academic: 'Will he get tenure?' (Burroughs, 1995: 37).

However, for the project at hand, it is perhaps more important to situate this work in relation to drug culture, and its extra-textual practices, habits, and behaviors, than to delineate its specific generic distinctions and crossovers. Significantly, *Scanner* "is generally thought of as being Dick's anti-drugs book (see Youngquist, 2000)"; however, I complicate this critical commonplace while still following some of the argument's contours (Wood 46). Dick's novel, while not unsympathetic to the ethos of drug culture, gives a much more sardonic—at times other times, unspeakably sad—articulation of this cultural formation. One telling example is when Barris is impersonating Arctor on the telephone and ends the call by saying, "Turn on, tune out, and good-by" (*Scanner* 172). Although Arctor describes "Barris's sign-off" as a "direct quote of Tim Leary's original funky ultimatum to the establishment and all the straights," it is a distortion of the adage popularized by

Leary, which was, “Turn on, tune in, and drop out” (*Scanner* 173; *Summer of Love*).⁶⁰ Almost like the game of ‘telephone,’ in which the medium of transfer interferes with the transferred content (the original message gets more garbled the more people it passes through), this scene dramatizes the historical transition and cultural translation. The parody of this infamous countercultural motto shows how the original intentions of the older proponents of drugs, who saw these substances as methods of consciousness expansion and societal transformation, have fallen by the wayside for a new generation of addicts. Still, the scene can also be read as more of a joke that repurposes the phrase for the immediately relevant context of hanging-up on someone. Even if we choose this more reparative reading of the drug culture in *Scanner*, the novel’s shift from the entheogenic to recreational drug use necessitates my shifting from Lilly’s drug discourse to also include that of Burroughs. While Lilly was always adamant that he was neither an addict nor a criminal, but rather a professional conducting research, Burroughs openly identified with his addiction and criminality. However, Burroughs also views drug abuse as a form of affective or physiological estrangement: “Kick is seeing things from a special angle. Kick is momentary freedom from the claims of the aging, cautious, nagging, frightened flesh” (*Junky* 99). Clearly, Burroughs does not see drug use as purely recreational as he also used substances as a vehicle for exploring and altering perception and the recreation is here described as relief. Neither does Lilly see drug use as purely instrumental; he too said that drugs “give an overall positive motivational aspect to the individual,” which “may facilitate program modifications, but...can [equally] facilitate seeking pleasure as a goal of itself” (*Programming and Metaprogramming* 25). These nonfictional accounts represent two possible permutations in the articulation of drug culture as a formation, although they remain inextricably

⁶⁰ Leary actually credits McLuhan with giving him the phrase during the 1960s. In a 1988 interview, Leary describes McLuhan’s creation of the adage, saying that he “was very much interested in ideas and marketing, and he started singing something like, ‘Psychedelics hit the spot / Five hundred micrograms, that’s a lot,’ to the tune of a Pepsi commercial. Then he started going, ‘Tune in, turn on, and drop out’” (qtd. in Strauss 338).

intertwined in more ways than not.

Using this as a critical and cultural context marks a reparative reading of a paranoid novel that does not slip into what might be viewed as the celebratory mode of drug culture of the 1960s and the popular discourse surrounding it. This reading is also careful to avoid the pitfalls of the standard paranoid reading which just as surely slips back into the same politics of prohibition that the counterculture was responding to in the first place with its politics of pleasure. As Sedgwick emphatically argues, “seeking pleasure” is another way of “finding and organizing knowledge,” a perspective that breaks the binary logic of ‘thinking drugs’ as either practices of investigation or recreation but never as *both* (“Paranoid Reading” 138). The reading thus does not position *Scanner* as Dick’s “anti-drug” book nor of course does it read it as “pro-drug” book because to do so would be to categorically miss the work of the novel. While the transformations of the fictional setting intersect with Dick’s historical allusions and autobiographical anecdotes, neither of these sources of nonfiction could possibly reduce the SF narrative to a piece of political propaganda of the kind that is affectively satirized in the opening anti-drug speech given by Arctor-as-Fred as a compulsory requirement of his employment. This speech alone should disqualify any reading of the novel which is obviously “anti-drug” (as should Dick’s own personal history of long-term drug use and his promotion of it to some extent in his works of nonfiction). Of course, neither is the novel “pro-drug,” as Lilly, for example, and even Burroughs at times, appears to be. An example is Dick’s difficult to pin down and often self-contradictory position in respect to the “pro-drug” or “anti-drug” debate—in most ways a false one, to be sure—in a 1977 interview he says it like this:

I certainly don't advocate the use of drugs. However, one thing that I took that I did like was mescaline. Mescaline is fascinating, if it's good mescaline and not bad acid, weak acid. I took mescaline once and it really was a psychedelic an altered state of consciousness. It put me in touch with my deepest feelings. It put me in touch with feelings that I wasn't aware that I had. That is, it put me in touch with myself. And it was really very marvelous.

Let me tell you one anecdote to show you what people who are into drugs will do. In Marin County where I live an army disorientation drug was stolen by the Hells Angels. The purpose of the drug was to totally disorient you...And it just completely screws you up so you couldn't do anything...The people who took it thought it was wonderful. They were looking for more of it. I think that tells something about the drug culture. We used to joke about it. We'd say, god, that was terrible. Where can I get some more? (Anton, Fuchs 46).⁶¹

Obviously, the idea that he doesn't "advocate the use of drugs" is immediately undermined by the subsequent and very long description of his deeply affective, life-altering experience on mescaline; still, the final lines of the excerpt regarding "the drug culture" are rather apt both in the sense that it is about a criminally-appropriated "disorientation drug" stolen by another subcultural group from the U.S. Army which everyone who took it voluntarily inexplicably loved and that it is couched in a sort of joke which is also seriously meant to explain a culture that for the same reason is difficult to fully endorse or to entirely dismiss. Strangely, the sincerity and satire, which in Dick's interview is evidenced in two short paragraphs, is the most striking feature of the drug culture; the affective pull of the experiences are in some ways unable to be cognitively rendered in anything but a joke. The last line expresses an understanding of the affectively inexplicable—but also in the context of those participating in need of no explanation—allure of drugs as both "marvelous" and "terrible" desired objects. Importantly, Burroughs and Lilly, unlike Dick, claim to have never regretted their drug abuse, destructive as it may have been. Burroughs even goes so far as to assert, "when you stop growing you start dying...[and] an addict never stops growing," and while Dick may agree to some extent, he counters this as well, saying that for the addict, "the dying begins almost at once" (*Junky* 3; *Scanner* 288).

In the prologue to his autobiographical novel, *Junkie: Confessions of an Unredeemed Drug Addict* (1953), Burroughs argues, "Junk is not a kick. It is a way of life" (12). This description of

⁶¹ Dick directly alludes to this anecdote in *Scanner* when Arctor says: "It won't help me much if the holoscanners pick up me being given a hotshot of some disorientation drug ripped off by the Hell's Angels from a military arsenal" (73).

drug culture as a lifestyle makes it comparable in some ways to other so-called deviant subcultures of anti-normative identity—most notably that of homosexuality—based on illicit or illegal desire. This rather forthright assertion of drug culture as a way of life or a lifestyle is succinctly expressed by Dick’s character Charles Freck, who says, “Happiness...is knowing you got some pills...What more could he ask from life?” (*Scanner* 14). In 1970 letter, Dick writes practically the same thing, saying his “happiness pills” had finally arrived, and so he was “cranked up on crank, so to speak” (*Letters* 346). As Dick said in a 1977 interview at a conference attended by many of the preeminent writers of the New Wave, “My writing falls into two degrees, the writing done under the influence of drugs and the writing I’ve done when I’m not under the influence of drugs,” before amending the former by saying, “but when I’m not under the influence of drugs I write about drugs” (qtd. in Bertrand 38). In a short piece called the “Biographical Material on Philip K. Dick” (1968), it says: “Warning: don’t lend [me] any money. In addition [I] will steal your pills” (20). The lifestyle of drug culture thus often involves a certain level of criminality which is in opposition to prevailing notions of morality. Burroughs says his own criminal proclivities were much more about rejecting the unreality of suburban life than embracing an alternative reality for its own sake. He describes his “criminal acts...[as] gestures, unprofitable and for the most part unpunished” (*Junky* 2). Dick’s Author’s Note counters this perspective because, conversely, “the punishment was beyond belief: even when we could see it, we could not believe it” (*Scanner* 287). In either case, the question as to what such gestures are meant to accomplish is brought to bear; however, to ask this would be to fundamentally misunderstand recreational drug culture as such, which arguably serves the negative function of social rebellion without erecting something ‘better’ in its place. In this way, the gesture of criminality can be understood more as a generalized middle finger to the current world than an index finger pointing to a superior world, so to speak. Burroughs states: “You become a narcotics

addict because you do not have strong motivations in any other direction...[addicts] did not start using drugs for any reason they can remember. They just drifted along until they got hooked” (*Junky* 3). Likewise, Arctor claims most Substance D users “didn’t know what they were getting on or even that they were getting on anything at all” (*Scanner* 26). I would add that Burroughs’s observation—that addicts can’t “remember” the “reason” they started using drugs—is not exactly capturing the fact that *affect* is a “reason” which does not really need to be “remembered” because it just *is*. Still, what may begin as a relatively minor or thoughtless rejection of societal mores and norms can quickly become something vital to one’s social (or antisocial) identity or, in the case of drug addiction, constitutive of one’s physical body. Yet, as Burroughs says, “When I speak of drug addiction, I do not refer...to any...drug in the hallucinogen group....There is no evidence that the use of any hallucinogen results in physical dependence” (*Naked Lunch* 4). While this might be true, at least in part, Dick further complicates Burroughs’s distinction between entheogenic and recreational drug classes with his invention of the fictional Substance D—a highly addictive narcotic with hallucinogenic properties. Dick’s Author’s Note, I argue, fails to capture the affective agony that saturates the novel’s pages which more than suggests that relief is a compelling ‘reason’ for the drug practices so thoughtlessly written-off in the mainstream culture as ‘senseless’: “they wanted to have a good time, but they were like children playing in the street; they could see one after another of them being killed—run over, maimed, destroyed—but they continued to play anyhow” (*Scanner* 287). If the children were playing in the street because the sidewalk had become unbearable as a social and perceptual venue then the Author’s Note might more closely conform to what in the novel itself is a fairer evaluation of the drug culture and its participants. Because sometimes “the goddamn pain is unbearable,” and then there is “the longing” (5, 6). Or as Donna and Mike, reflecting on Arctor’s sacrifice, agree at the novel’s end: “Life asks an awful lot” (214).

That being said, while the Author's Note is written in memoriam to friends lost to drug abuse, Dick is still adamant that there is "no moral in this novel" (288). Dick also says that though he is not a character in the novel, "[He is] the novel...[and so was] our entire nation at this time" (288). Dick thus flags this work in particular as an intentional cross-linking of American literature and culture, which are both derived from and connected to popular culture and everyday life, but which are not always read together as such. He goes on to say drug culture was "the bad decision of the decade, the sixties, both in and out of the establishment," and "when a bunch of people begin to do it, it is a social error, a life-style," one whose motto is "be happy now because tomorrow you are dying" (287). Although Dick rejects this slogan as shortsighted because it is necessarily short-lived, this nihilistic attitude is voiced by almost every relevant character (re: addict) in the novel. Again, what the Author's Note does not say is what motto might explain the non-addict characters' "life-style" in and out of the novel: *Be happy now for you are dying in twenty to forty-five years if you stop smoking perhaps fifty* does not seem like much of an improvement either philosophically, politically, or affectively. Unlike Burroughs, Dick sees "drug misuse...[as] a decision," not as a disease: "it is a decision," he says, "like the decision to step out in front of a moving car," which you would call "not a disease but an error in judgment" (287). The nihilism of this strain of drug culture has its counterpart in SF as, according to Ballard, the genre often acts out cultural "visions of world cataclysm...[and] destruction," which drug users display by 'acting out' at the individual level ("Cataclysms and Dooms" 208). From this perspective, even the most destructive examples of drug culture appear less destructive than the political mainstream of global affairs. As Arctor says, "The most dangerous kind of person...is one who is afraid of his own shadow," which, at least biblically speaking, is the shadow of death—one's own death (*Scanner* 107).⁶² Dick's novel

⁶² One reading of Substance D—also known as "Substance Death" or "Slow Death"—is that of bartering the shadow of death for the substance of it. Said again, "Substance D" is a sort of biblical pun that makes the shadow of life into

is not necessarily apocalyptic, but its dystopic setting borders on the devastation of the underworld due to an epidemic of Substance D; however, unlike drugs in the real world, Substance D has been purposefully designed to destroy the cognitive function of those addicted in order to repurpose the ‘wasted’ lives of addicts by extracting ‘lost’ labor from bodies that now finally and fully comply with the body-as-machine model of Fordist efficiency. Capitalist modernity, I suggest, is the real “error in judgment,” and this speaks to the totality of the circumstances as rendered in the novel, which is not simply a critique of 1960s drug culture but a scathing indictment of the prevailing ideology. As Tom McCarthy argues—an idea thematized in Marinetti’s Futurist manifesto (1909) and in Ballard’s novel, *Crash* (1973)—“culturally speaking, [modernity] begins with a CAR CRASH” (“INS Manifesto”). So, Dick’s ‘playing in traffic’ metaphor, slightly revised, might see the people stepping out in front of moving cars as ‘acting out’ in opposition to the “neoliberal versions of capitalism and democracy [which] present themselves as an inevitability, [as] a destiny to whom the Future belongs”; the metaphor of modernity as a car crash also speaks to a “larger ontological impossibility: if time and space died yesterday, then where and what is the tomorrow into which we should be moving?” (“INS Manifesto”).

Still, as Ballard claims of the SF of doom and dystopia, the novel is not merely an “over-

a living death. The language of the shadow of death and life as a shadow are both used in the Bible. For instance, in Ecclesiastes 6:12: “For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, *all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?*”; in Psalm 23:4: “Though I walk *through the valley of the shadow of death...*” (AKJV, emphasis mine). A passage from *Scanner* further supports/complicates the use of these particular biblical passages in our reading of it:

Vain, he thought, to try to place your hands firmly on one of the federal drug-abuse agents. They are furtive. *Shadows* which melt away when their job dictates. As if they were never really there in the first place. *Arctor*, he thought, *was in love with a phantom of authority, a kind of hologram, through which a normal man could walk, and emerge on the far side, alone.* Without ever having gotten a good grip on it—on the girl [Donna].

The specific words (*vain*, *shadows*, *walk through*) from these bible verses and their associations (*phantom*, *hologram*, *the far side*) within the novel’s metaphoric network of allusions and illusions signal a sort of play between shadow and substance. Again, approaching metafiction, the novel reflects on itself without the postmodernist pretexts and pretensions: “There should be a monument somewhere, [Mike] thinks, listing those who died in this. *And, worse, those who didn't die. Who have to live on, past death.* Like Bob Arctor. The saddest of all” (*Scanner* 216, emphasis mine).

extended metaphor of some kind of suicidal self-hate,” but rather “represents a constructive and positive act by the imagination rather than a negative one...[and thus is] an attempt to confront a patently meaningless universe by challenging it at its own game” (“Cataclysms and Doom” 209). In this way, drug culture and SF function as a revolt against the “inflexibility of this huge reductive machine we call reality” through the undermining of norms and posing of “infinite alternatives to reality” (209). The overlap of a particular sensibility, in this case, the feeling or knowledge that the world we inhabit is an arbitrary historical contingency, one which can change and be changed, creates a “sympathetic reinforcement” between these two cultural formations (Grossberg 57). Dark as the novel and the culture it thematizes tend to be, there are sudden moments of reprieve from this primarily negative view: “he felt bad, really bad...to have witnessed the darkening change, and he wondered again why, and what it signified, but then it occurred to him that maybe things would go the other way again and get better, and that cheered him” (*Scanner* 107). This cerebral and hot-blooded outlook on life impacts the way that people orient to themselves and to the world, which influences how people choose to consume cultural artifacts, participate in social practices, and define their identities. These are the real effects that arise from and contribute to the discursive formation of this dual articulation, which the novel further displays. The realization that “days and happenings and moments so good become so quickly ugly, and for no reason, for no real reason” and “we can’t even be sure we’ll see another sunrise” not only creates a sense of despair at the prospect of death, but also a sort of affective urgency and renewed intensity about the possibilities of life (134, 39). As Arctor reflects on real musicians of the historical period who died of drug overdoses, including “Jim Croce, and J.J., but especially Hendrix,” he imagines them murmuring, “Before I die...let me live my life as I want to” (135). And then “he heard in his head [Joplin’s] song ‘All Is Loneliness,’ and he began to cry. And in that condition drove on toward home” (107).

If one has an overly theoretical view of time as illusory, or an overly practical view of death as inevitable, then there is no reason not to extract as much pleasure as possible from the current moment in a sort of radical freedom. While seemingly in contradiction with capitalist ideologies that dictate the proper behavior of individuals, it is essentially the view of capitalism at the scale of global, ecological resource extraction. Of course, this perspective is only frowned upon when it comes to the individual in whom it does nothing except possibly keep them from contributing to other, larger project of capitalism, which is ideologically sanctioned and so goes without saying. However, the literary treatment of time in the novel offers a throughline that cuts across Dick's philosophical nonfiction, Ballard's theories of SF, and the practices of drug culture. For instance, Jerry Fabin expresses the desire to "abolish time for him and his friends...[because] by doing that he could concentrate on important things without interruption" (4). Although this at first sounds almost academic, echoing Dick's critical essays on time as a "veil...[that] lies between us and reality," this interpretation is immediately undermined by the "important things" to which Jerry refers ("Man, Android, Machine" 214). Upon closer inspection, Charles and Jerry are "kneeling down on the shag rug, finding bug after bug and putting them into jar after jar" (*Scanner* 4). These bugs, of course, do not exist, but are part of an elaborate paranoid delusion entertained by Jerry before he is committed to a psychiatric ward. In this way, Dick ironically dramatizes the difficulty of distinguishing drug-addled delusions from metaphysical revelations when analyzing drug culture as a formation. This satirical scene also poses another question, however, which asks us to seriously consider what the "important things" that we all 'spend' our time concentrating on really are, and what they might be under a different set of social circumstances. The term 'wasted' as it is used in relation to drug culture means to be 'very drunk or sick from drugs,' which is already couched within the frame of 'wasted time' or even literal waste or garbage that is worthless but

only in terms of capitalist production. In any case, the scene articulates another relay point between drug culture and especially New Wave SF, in that both formations engage with theories of time from liminal spaces which move between conscious perception and unconscious processes. So, just as Ballard sees SF as “an arraignment of the finite, an attempt to dismantle the formal structure of time and space which the universe wraps around us at the moment we first achieve consciousness,” so Dick sees drugs as a way to effectively “break down and then utterly collapse” the “categories of space-time experiences [and] our basic matrix through which we encounter the universe” (“Cataclysms and Doom” 209; “Man, Android, Machine” 218). As Grossberg argues, even negative “lines of flight...challenge specific territorializations...[and] the very desirability of territorializing itself” (155). Counterintuitively, then, such “articulated possibilities of the lines of flight...constitute [the formation’s] moment of...power,” precisely because it attempts to place “itself outside of the mainstream and of everyday life, even as it is trapped within both” (155).

Another “mode of articulation,” which produces a cultural “alliance” as a “secondary articulation of the formation,” is found in the escapist tendencies expressed and embodied through SF and drug culture (Grossberg 56, 71). Both are meant to change the current state of affairs for the individual, whether by displacing the present circumstances with a fictional scenario or by distorting one’s present condition with actual mind-altering substances. Escapism, through the entertainment of SF or through the gratification of recreational drugs, is a method of coping with the banality and triviality of everyday life. It is also related to the pursuit of pleasure in a seemingly unpleasant and disappointing world. As Dick states in the Author’s Note, “If there was any ‘sin,’ it was that these people wanted to keep on having a good time forever” (*Scanner* 288). I’d add that this could just as easily be paraphrased as ‘they simply didn’t want to have a terrible time anymore’ because at the end of the day, all pleasure is relief from pain. The actualized desire for escape from

this world is also I argue the unarticulated desire for another, better world. Donna tells Arctor about her friend's LSD experience in which "he saw a doorway," and Arctor asks, "What was on the other side?", and she answers, "there was another world on the other side" (193). The question, then, of how the textual and the real work together in order for these "specific cultural formations [to] become 'affective alliances'" is through a continued interaction between people and practices, action and articulation, affect and ideology (Grossberg 80). Drug culture and SF both participate in "the rearticulation of common sense and the reconstruction of a 'national popular,'" which is how historical change occurs (255). Thus, Grossberg's "territorializing-differentiating machine" works through these two intersecting cultural formations (261). While a differentiating machine creates the distinction between self/other constructed through identity, a territorializing machine constructs a "system of circulation" in the form of affective investments (104). In other words, drug culture's revolt against common sense, or the fact that it is anti-ideological, changes affective investments in popular culture, which may in turn create a need for SF as a different way to organize and conceptualize existence. Equally, the cause and effect in this example can be reversed, as an affective investment in SF, coupled with its destabilization of reality, may lead to an embrace of drug culture as an alternative way to make life intelligible. And finally, these can occur simultaneously, for "not only does the cause have effects, but the effects themselves affect the cause, and both are themselves determined by a host of other relations" (56). So, though Dick's novel like this chapter attempts to "reconstruct daily life" and its relationship to popular culture, this task can never be "completed" and will always require "further work" (247). In my view, a critical, reconstructive project requires a reparative framework—even and especially in the most paranoid literary and cultural contexts.

becoming android: the addict as automaton

Imagine the barren banality of a drug-free America. No dope fiends, just good, clean-living, decent Americans, from sea to shining sea (Burroughs, 1995: 204).

How can anyone endure this furtive, precarious life without junk? (Burroughs, 1995: 132).

The most compellingly rendered scenes in *Scanner* express a profound dissatisfaction with the status quo and its participants, whom the junkies refer to as “straights” (22). While performing his undercover duties, it says that Arctor “felt nausea” when he looked at one of the straights—“he was an overweight man, overaged as well, overhappy even when there was little or nothing to be happy about” (19). In this way, Arctor reframes the inappropriate affect and excessive appetite of drug users by locating it in “the straights” rather than in “the dopers” (22). This fundamentally negative disposition towards the average person and the culture at large is a crucial component in the formation of any counterculture. The perception of the self as ‘other’ (or as different from mainstream culture) creates the need to form an alternate, often group, identity. Arctor perceives the “detested straights” as either inauthentic or just plain stupid, and this estrangement from society provokes in him both “anger...and a sense of futility” (22-3). While giving his anti-drug speech, he begins to stammer and forgets his lines. At this time, he realizes that “this stuff,” presumably the propaganda he is spewing as well as the falsity he identifies in himself and others, “is why you lurch off and become a doper...this is why you give up and leave. In disgust” (25). Effectively, Arctor weaponizes language generally wielded against dopers to again cite that the ‘reason’ behind drug use is *affect*. When looking for a friend at a New Path clinic, the attendant will offer Arctor the ‘reason’ for his being there in a way that dehumanizes him as a drug addict and ignores his questions to replace them with her thoughts, suggesting he is there because of “Shame and a sense of disgust at the thing you are” (42). Thus, we see a generalized alienation from mainstream culture

and an extreme disillusionment with social institutions as the impetus for drug use in the novel, which counter intuitively creating an alternative social enclave positioned against the dominant culture. In this way, the “unshared world that we call ‘hallucinatory’” is not only “destructive,” as Dick claims, because of its “social effects,” but also productive insofar as it generates a subculture with its own social norms and practices (“Quest for Reality” 173). The murky underworld through which Arctor wades has its own customs and rules regulating social behavior; Arctor “looked like a doper...he conversed like a doper...[and] those around him...took him to be a doper and reacted accordingly” (*Scanner* 27). For example, “Other dopers—See there, he thought; ‘other,’—gave him a ‘peace, brother’ look, and the straights didn’t” (24). The exclusion from one social world functions as a form of re-entry that allows for inclusion and recognition in another. His subcultural markers communicate his identity to other members of the social body in a way that need not be overtly stated yet which allocates belongingness and dictates responsiveness in the systems of affective and ideological circulation. In *Scanner*, it says: “the typical average citizen...continually signaled their identity back and forth to one another and their peers” but so did “the punks, the hot rodders, the bikers, and especially the dealers and runners and pushers” (114).

One particularly incisive moment in the novel occurs when Arctor describes the epiphany that led to the definitive turning point in his life. After hitting his head on a cabinet, which seems to have ‘knocked some sense into him,’ so to speak, he realized “that he didn’t hate the kitchen cabinet: he hated his wife, his two daughters, his whole house...the whole fucking place,” because “that life had been one without excitement, with no adventure... [where] nothing new could ever be expected” (65). This passage expresses the overwhelming discontentment with suburbia, the disillusionment with the American dream, and the tyrannical tedium of everyday life, which is defined by its “repetition, redundancy, and recurrence” (Grossberg 149). Although “probably he

should have regretted his decision” to abandon his family, Arctor sees his former life as “a little plastic boat that would sail on forever, without incidence, until it finally sank, which would be a secret relief to all” (*Scanner* 65).⁶³ And therein lies the appeal of drug culture, for “in this dark world where he now dwelt, ugly things and surprising things and once in a long while tiny wondrous things spilled out at him constantly; he could count on nothing” (65). For Arctor, the underworld of drug culture is a negation of the nuclear family, the status quo, and rigid routine; dooper identity requires a new type of secrecy because of its criminal component, but it’s affective position and identity politics are also an open secret of sorts. Arctor cannot explain his reasoning for this abrupt lifestyle change precisely, but he surmises it stemmed from, “Boredom, maybe; the desire for a little action. Secret hostility toward everyone around him” (66). Keeping his emotional life a secret in the social world of the straights is what eventually turns him toward the embrace of a new social identity with members who are equally disillusioned and fed up with the mainstream culture. The excitement comes, in part, from the confusion of the real and the fictional, because in his new life “psychotic paranoids with hallucinatory grudges acted out in reality, not fantasy” (65). However, eventually the confusion of these realms becomes a complete fusion, as the reader watches Arctor “burn out from the inside, [his brain like] fucked-over wiring...[with] parts overloaded...line surges, smoke, and a bad smell” (67). Still, later on Donna thinks to herself: “maybe inside the terribly burned and burning circuits of your head that char more and more...a spark of color and light in some disguised form [remains]... unrecognized” and survives as she “hold[s] him, silently, in the darkness that was swallowing him up from inside” (194). In the final analysis, she concludes: “something from another world perhaps had appeared to Bob Arctor before it was over” (194). This language also mirrors that which is used to describe Poole’s final

⁶³ Interestingly, his supervising officer, Hank, uses the same language when Arctor, while undercover, says that: “Somebody,” Fred said, “will get us all anyhow eventually,” and Hank replies, “It’ll be a relief. A distinct relief” (56).

overdose experience, in which “all the neurocircuits jump their gaps and short out;” however, at least his death is precipitated by “an enormous mass of [words] brilliantly lighting his mind, scorching him with their utter meaning” (“Electric Ant” 111). This is a more reparative take on what exactly it is that “burn[s] you out,” yet, as Sarah “saw the curl of smoke ascending from Poole’s half-opened mouth,” Poole’s last thought is: “His mouth burned. He wondered why” (115).

Much of Arctor’s frustration arises from the apparent unreality of American consumerism, where one is always “going nowhere, going everywhere” (*Scanner* 28). From his perspective, “Life...was a commercial for itself, endlessly replayed. Nothing changed; it just spread out farther and farther in the form of neon ooze” (29). In such a meaningless, superficial, and monotonous world, “all bolted down, [like] a hospital-like room, purified and sterile and cold, with the light too bright,” Arctor says, “I wish I knew how to go crazy. I forget how” (90, 56).⁶⁴ This darkly prophetic statement echoes a sentiment from another of Dick’s novels, *Valis*, in which Dick’s alter ego, Horselover Fat, says, “it is sometimes an appropriate response to reality to go insane” (*Valis* 2). This implies that if reality is irrational (or overly rational), as it appears to Arctor, then insanity is perhaps the only available response. In a psychiatric assessment of Arctor’s progression toward drug-induced psychosis, which rightly concludes he is well on his way to that point, the patent absurdity and insanity of mainstream society is satirized in the following exchange: “The seated deputy said...‘Can you see the form here? It should jump right out at you.’ ‘I see a Coke bottle,’ Fred said. ‘A soda pop bottle is correct,’ the seated deputy said, and whipped the drawing away, replacing it with another” (*Scanner* 92). Still, while undercover as Fred, Arctor employs a more calculated coping mechanism by assuming “a measured and uninvolved attitude” (57). Arctor purposefully shuts down his affective response to simulate “dispassion” and dissociates from the

⁶⁴ In reply, as a metacommentary on the era, Hanks says: “It’s a lost art...Maybe there’s an instruction manual on it.”

“emotional significance” of his undercover operations, especially his attachments to Luckman and Donna, in order to transmute himself into Fred (57). Arctor explains that Fred’s detachment is “an economy of passions,” for “an individual had just so much energy” and could not “leap up and exclaim” at every horror and atrocity encountered (58). He describes “this change in him as Fred” as “the same trip” that “firemen and doctors and morticians did...in their work”; otherwise, “they would first wear themselves out and be worthless and then wear out everyone else, both as technicians on the job and as humans off” (48). This commentary is less on the alienation of labor than the willful estrangement of the self and other in a system of social organization that requires people to function in conditions not amenable to natural human emotions. Not insignificantly, Arctor describes this required dissociation as a “trip” which is the same language used to describe the dissociative effects of drugs in the novel. To assimilate into mainstream culture, “he had to neutralize himself,” but “later on Fred evolved into Bob Arctor...and his feelings seeped back in” (57, 58). Contrary to what one might expect, this shows that it is the drug addict, Arctor, rather than the law enforcement agent, Fred, who is more invested in the people who occupy the reality he routinely tries to escape. In other words, although his participation in doper culture eventually dampens Arctor’s cognitive abilities, his involvement in mainstream culture deadens his emotional capacities—because as Fred, he “could offhandedly say...‘Donna is dead’....his own chick ...without feeling” (58). So, when Arctor-Fred is troubleshooting the problems presented by the new holoscanners, he tells his supervising officer, “I’ll edit myself out...So you won’t see me. As a matter of conventional protection”; however, I argue that there is a real way in which this is yet another literalization of what he has already done psychologically (with his disaffected demeanor) and technologically (with the senseless scramblesuit) (87).

Interestingly, in *Scanner*, one of the preeminent themes is the preservation of affect despite

the loss of identity. This runs counter to Jameson's characterization of postmodernism where he claims the movement towards "fragmentation" of the subject contributes to the "waning of affect" because there is "no longer a self present to do the feeling" (*Cultural Logic* 14-15). Conversely, *Scanner* suggests that affect does not emerge solely from the ego or identity and can even survive "the 'death' of the subject itself" (15). Throughout the narrative, Arctor—whose 'real' name is never mentioned—continually asks: "But...who am I?" (*Scanner* 80). From the beginning, his identity is problematized in the assumed identity of "Bob Arctor" who is "posing as a nark" while passing as "Officer Fred" (90). This doubling in which he is not posing as a doper but as a narc who has assumed another identity as a double agent takes the Modernist motif of the split self to the point of absurdity. This initial fracture intensifies throughout the novel until it finally breaks. Arctor wonders, "Is Fred actually the same as Bob Arctor? Does anybody know? I would know, if anyone did, because I'm the only person in the world that knows that Fred is Bob Arctor" (80). He reflects on the strangeness of his subject position (which requires the use of multiple names) and the confusion of social recognition (which requires a certain level of misrecognition) that has come from what was originally undertaken in *the name* of authenticity (in his affect and identity):

What am I actually? he asked himself. He wished, momentarily, for his scramble suit. Then, he thought, I could go on being a vague blur and passers-by, street people in general, would applaud. Let's hear it for the vague blur, he thought, doing a short rerun. What a way to get recognition. How, for instance, could they be sure it wasn't some other vague blur and not the right one? It could be somebody other than Fred inside, or another Fred, and they'd never know, not even when Fred opened his mouth and talked. They wouldn't really know then. They'd never know. *It could be Al pretending to be Fred, for example. It could be anyone in there, it could even be empty* (25, emphasis mine).

After all, "a suit" is a derogatory metonymic expression for a "businessman," or someone wearing a "suit," which illustrates the interchangeability of the labor force as well as the willingness of the people who work in that upper-middle class to upper-class job description to sacrifice or evacuate

their identity to take-on a veneer of authority in its stead. Scramblesuits take this one step further.

Nevertheless, Arctor's strong feelings for Donna persist throughout and she functions as a "pivot point of reality for him" (106). By the end of the narrative, he is no longer Bob Arctor, the addict, or even his undercover pseudonym, Fred; rather, he has become a complete burnout with no sense of self—he has internally become "a vague blur and nothing more," just as he appeared externally in the scramble suit—a nonperson who now happens to be called Bruce (20). Thus, although Arctor intentionally discarded his original identity, when he was allegedly a husband and father, in order to create a new and more exciting life for himself as Arctor/Fred, he ends up accidentally losing himself entirely along the way. The loss of identity, or ego, may be a positive experience in the short term, as it can restructure one's conception of the relation between self and other, but there is clearly a point of no return. No positive social function comes from a cultural practice that takes the person out of their alternative subcultural community (as at New Path rehabilitation, there "are no one-to-one relationships") or provides the individual with insights that cannot be shared, which as far as we know, is what happens to Arctor (43). In fact, the only discernable remnant of Arctor in the closing pages of the novel is his affective attachment to Donna. When she takes him to New Path Clinic, she holds his hand. And the "touch of her lingered, inside his heart. That remained. In all the years of his life ahead, the long years without her...that touch stayed locked within him, sealed in himself, and never went away" (164). This passage offers a shard of utopian hope that survives this dystopian nightmare and suggests that, perhaps, "some fragment of a star [really is] mixed with the trash of this world" (243). This is the "heart" of *Scanner* and the "star" of New Wave SF, which is about affective and aesthetic experiences of inner space which categorically do not conform to those of the outer space science fictional tropes.

Although Dick does not, like William Gibson in *Neuromancer*, imagine a "sensorium,"

which allows for the “experience of another’s body, ‘other flesh,’ *from within*,” he develops a prototype of sorts in the “new holographic system,” which Fred uses to monitor Arctor’s house (McHale 260, emphasis in original; *Scanner* 61). The act of spying on himself gives Arctor/Fred the “opportunity to see himself from another point of view,” though not “literally *through another’s eyes* (or eye, in fact),” as Case can see through Molly’s eye in *Neuromancer* (McHale 260, emphasis in original). However, when Fred views Arctor as a “3-D hologram,” reversed through the “eyes” of the holo-scanner that “does not ever blink,” he cannot “recognize himself” (*Scanner* 139). This dramatizes the idea of ‘becoming other,’ who is also oneself; however, the order is reversed, as Fred, the ‘other,’ attempts to become himself, who is also Arctor. Said again, Fred perceives Arctor “backward” through “a darkened mirror...a darkened scanner,” typifying and extending the mirror stage effect of seeing a ‘real illusion,’ which is of course ‘you’ and ‘not you’ (220). This scene exposes some nascent links to cyberpunk fiction, which tries to imagine “what it would be like to *be* a centrifugal self—to be in two places at once...[and] to occupy two different points of view...simultaneously” (McHale 261, emphasis in original). Indeed, Arctor’s doctors tell him that “neural aphasia” causes one to experience, “Thoughts not your own. As if another person or mind were thinking. But different from the way you would think” (*Scanner* 113, 116).⁶⁵ However, the overwhelming simultaneity of the experience of embodying both self and other, termed “cross-chatter,” is a “pretty shattering experience” for those afflicted (116). Though “brain toxicity” is dangerous to one’s sense of singular self, it also reveals a certain abstract truth, because the “subjective feeling possessed by each of us that we are One” is a more or less illusory

⁶⁵ This immediately recalls Burroughs’s citation of Lilly’s experiments in *Ticket*: “The ‘Other-Half’ is the word...the presence of...a separate organism attached to your nervous system on an air line of words can now be demonstrated experimentally...the most common ‘hallucinations’ of subjects during sense withdrawal is the feeling of another body sprawled through the subject’s body at an angle...Modern man has lost the option of silence...Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that *forces you to talk*” (39, emphasis in original).

conception created by “Western Man” (114).⁶⁶ Fragmentation thus appears as the natural condition with each person possessing “two independent spheres of consciousness within a single cranium” (122).⁶⁷

In other words, there are moments in the text when Arctor’s disintegration appears to lead him to philosophical insights of ontological value. More crucially, Arctor articulates ideas found in “The Electric Ant” and “Man, Android, and Machine,” claiming, “I have seen myself backward. I have in a sense begun to see the entire universe backward. With the other side of my brain!” (221). This, of course, is precisely the way Poole articulates his desire to experience ultimate reality, while also expressing Dick’s claim that time does not flow in one direction. This is further supported when Arctor considers the nature of time, which he determines is “round,” like a “cassette loop” (224). This concept directly references Dick’s idea that “true orthogonal time” is “rotary” (“Man, Android, Machine” 216). Said differently, the nature of space-time, if witnessed from a fictional vantage point, would look much like the “primitive cyclic time,” but “on a vaster scale” (215, 216). In his essay, Dick attributes these insights to his own various self-experiments, which allegedly allowed him to come into contact with an ultimate reality that is “not outside us as such, but in each of us...within the right hemispheres of our brain” (231). In this way, we see the ontological investment of new materialisms, which sees absolute notions as immanent in matter, expressed in SF and accessed, however briefly, through drug use. For example, in *Scanner*, Arctor’s doctors tell him that although it “may sound like metaphysics...the math people say we may be on the verge of a new cosmology,” which validates “the infinity of time, which is expressed

⁶⁶ As Metzinger argues: “A biological organism, as such, is not a self. An Ego is not a self, either, but merely a form of representational content—namely, the content of a transparent self-model activated in the organism’s brain” (8).

⁶⁷ The idea of fragmentation as the natural or originary condition of the self tracks with what Jameson describes as the “radical poststructuralist position,” for which a “centered subject...never existed in the first place but constituted something like an ideological mirage” (*Cultural Logic* 15).

as eternity, as a loop” (223). Ideas found in quantum mechanics, then, prompt Arctor in a new understanding of “what that passage in the Bible means, Through a Glass darkly” (223). This passage thus juxtaposes ideas of secular and religious time, seemingly favoring the latter, as Arctor realizes, in broken grammar, “The First and Second Coming of Christ the same event...time a cassette loop. No wonder they were sure it’d happen. He’d be back” (224). In this way, the latent structure of the novel reverts back to older accounts of time, which Benedict Anderson describes in *Imagined Communities*. Quoting Walter Benjamin, who famously called premodern, religious time “Messianic time” and modern, secular time “homogeneous, empty time,” Anderson accounts historically for the “fundamental change” that took place “in modes of apprehending the world” (24, 22). Anderson claims that “the mediaeval Christian mind had no conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect or of radical separation between past and present,” which he relates to Bloch’s observation that “people thought they must be near the end of time, in the sense that Christ’s second coming could occur at any moment” (23).

Yet, there is a darker side to this story, as the momentary “exhilarating self-expansion” quickly degenerates into complete absorption “into the machine” (McHale 256, 257). Junkies in *Scanner* are repeatedly compared to mechanistic systems of automation, going through life like, “A reflex machine. Like some insect. Repeating doomed patterns, a single pattern, over and over” (66). The mind of an addict is described as “a tape in his head” that “plays him his instructions,” in order to get him “to obtain more junk” (166). Arctor continues his reflection, narrating another kind of internal split created by addiction, and determines, “He, a machine, will turn you into *his* machine. Every junkie...is a recording” (166). The language of the junkie as a looping cassette tape connotes Arctor’s epiphany about cyclical time on a cosmic scale, but when Arctor is too estranged from individual, experienced time, “he becomes an insect that clacks and vibrates about

in a closed circle forever...like an ant" (275). In this way, Arctor does not achieve, or at least cannot sustain, the disintegrating forces of his "centrifugal self," which tear down every stabilizing psychic structure without erecting anything in its place (McHale 255). Arctor, now Bruce, can no longer process lineal time with his left hemisphere, let alone cyclical time with his right hemisphere, leaving "Arctor-Fred-Bruce" with no "future," "not even the past," but "only this" one moment in time (*Scanner* 275).⁶⁸ Clearly, the utopian attempt to use drugs in order to escape the "prison house" of the present, the closed horizon of everyday life, or what Ernst Bloch calls, "the darkness of the lived instant," failed to be realized here, leaving Arctor more entrapped than ever before (Munoz 1,5). For a time, it did lead Arctor somewhere else, for he "stepped across into that freaked-out paranoid space," but he ends up recaptured and punished for his transgression (*Scanner* 104). So, Arctor leaps toward the horizon, only to fall "down there" and become mired in "the murk of the mind and the murk outside as well" (206). There is, however, a paradox here because everyone, not just late-stage addicts, are immersed in the "murk of this dreary dream world we float around in" (206). The "prison house" of the present and "dreary dream world" of reality is not avoidable if one abstains from drug use; the escape just so happens to have caused another re-entry point to a different sort of hell than the one that was originally being temporarily avoided or mitigated through drug practices. If there is no "moral" in the novel, this is the lesson. And as the biblical allusions and temporal structure suggest, the end is not really the end of what is a much larger story. The "machine" into which Arctor-Fred is "absorbed," in the final analysis, is not the "soft machine," as Burroughs would say, but a capitalist machine which planned for this all along.

Scanner thus exemplifies a double movement with the shift toward postmodern concerns

⁶⁸ Arctor-Bruce literalizes Jameson's postmodern pathology as "schizophrenic," a condition that follows from the poststructuralist break down of "the links in a signifying chain" (*Cultural Logic* 26). The "schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers," in the case of Bruce, "a series of pure and unrelated presents in time" (27).

with “ontological issues and themes” and away from postmodern indifference to characterization (McHale 253). Similarly, *Scanner* moves away from older SF conventions, which slide “among microworlds occupying the same ontological plane...along the same horizontal axis,” and moves toward a “two-tier ontology by juxtaposing the primary reality plane with a parallel [inner] realm,” which is arranged on a vertical axis (252). What Arctor experiences in his transformation to Bruce, then, is the obliteration of his inner ontological space, an interpretation supported by the name of the flower from which Substance D is derived, “*mors ontological*,” or, “Death of the spirit. The identity. The essential nature” (*Scanner* 264). Or, as Dick says, the “mentally ill person at one time or another *knew too much*...[and] as a result, so to speak, his head shut down” (“Quest for Reality” 174, emphasis in original). In other words, I argue that when estrangement becomes the norm, as is the case with drug addiction, it no longer has much if any hope of a positive transformative effect. The imposition a new normative condition undoes the utopian potential of the anti-normative practice. In other words, instead of gaining radical freedom from social and biological influences, rigid thinking and limited perception, and a rote and repetitive existence, the addict ends up enslaved to what Burroughs calls “*The Algebra of Need*,” which occurs when “A dope fiend is...in total need of dope” (*Naked Lunch* 4, emphasis in original). Said differently, the psychonaut’s vessel can sink, and even if the sailor does not drown, the dialectical travel back and forth between worlds becomes impossible. However, the life of an intrepid explorer is inherently dangerous and traversing unknown realms remains infinitely desirable. Still, the adventurer cannot predict what will be found there or if he/she will find a way back. For example, Donna describes an acid trip that very closely resembles Lilly’s concept of “alternity,” or what I am calling noncognitive estrangement, while depicting the “dark world” of drug culture that paradoxically contains “ugly things and surprising things and once in a while tiny wondrous things” (*Scanner*

65). On the acid trip, Donna's friend "saw a doorway" surrounded by "showers of colored sparks" for a week, but never went through it (241). On the other side of the door, "there was another world...he could see it" and then suddenly "it was closed and gone forever" (241). After its disappearance, Donna's friend realized "he was going to have to live on and on like he was, seeing nothing" (241). Therefore, while in some ways this experience of "alternity" or noncognitive estrangement opened up the horizon of everyday life, the glimpse of something more whet his appetite instead of sating it. And the insight that he could not go through that door, at least until "he died," did nothing, "in the final analysis but mess up his head" (241).

Still, if, as Arctor says, "we're all dreaming," then perhaps we can dream up something better, more beautiful, or more satisfying than currently exists (105). And so, arguably, there exists a latent potentiality for utopian coup d'état within this dystopian hierarchy of existence. Donna, who also turns out to have been an undercover agent trying to use Arctor to infiltrate New Path, guiltily reflects on her dishonesty to Arctor while driving on the highway. She determines that "justice and honesty and loyalty are not properties of this world," but nevertheless, "she rammed her old enemy, her ancient foe, the Coca-Cola truck, which went right on going without noticing" (247). With this rebellious, albeit ineffectual, act, Donna demonstrates "a spirit of merry defiance, of spirited, although not spiritual, bravery and uniqueness" ("Android and Human" 209). Although her car crashes into a ditch, Donna succeeds insofar as she takes on "a symbol and a reality that outweighed her" (*Scanner* 247). While not a form of political action that is easily recognized as "meaningful" and, like drug culture itself, is more likely regarded as "merely irresponsible," Dick claims to see "a happier future" in the latter ("Android and Human" 191). This articulation of drug culture is thus an example of what Dick calls a "spirited" if "not spiritual" form of both individual and social rebellion (209). The defiant unpredictability, the blatant disobedience, and the reckless

nature of Donna's action can be abstracted as a symbol of the novel's countercultural ethos in that it demonstrates a type of anarchistic utopianism in a totalitarian, dystopic state. As Dick says, "you cannot turn a human into an android if that human is going to break laws every chance he gets" (191). Therefore, in the context of a "totalitarian society in which the state apparatus is all-powerful," the "ethics most important for the survival of the true, human individual would be: cheat, lie, evade, fake it, be elsewhere, forge documents, [and] build improved gadgets in your garage that will outwit the gadgets used by the authorities" (194). This, then, can be seen as a negative line of flight, but one that paradoxically has positive valence. Through this lens, it is possible to see recreational drug culture as both meaningful and effective, because its participants become "rebels not out of theoretical, ideological considerations, but only out of what might be called pure selfishness" (192). In this way, the wholesale rejection of societal norms and regulations, for whatever reason, is a form of opting out. From this perspective, it is possible to see criminal countercultures as invested with potential, not necessarily to transform the system, but rather to create alternative lifestyles and social logics that shirk top-down discipline and control. Indeed, although drug culture as a formation "cannot escape everyday life," the novel shows that it can still "serve as a reminder of its imprisonment [and validate] the meaningfulness of such escape" (Grossberg 156).

Tragic as the ending is, it is not entirely foreclosed by the impassable horizon of a dystopic present, but instead left open to the possibility of an alternate ending or utopic future. When Donna discusses the effects of Substance D on those adversely affected, she describes it as: "The winter of the spirit. Mors ontologica. When the spirit is dead," but Mike adds a rejoinder, "Only asleep" (*Scanner* 42). When taking Arctor to a New Path clinic, Donna tells him: "Try to wait for the end. Sometime, a long time from now, you'll see the way you saw before. It'll come back to you" (194).

Here, Donna trusts that what is not seen remains dormant but alive, and that it will be able “to lead [him], by its memory...to guide [him] by reflex until the day...” when he may return to her “restored” (194). This reading is further supported by the final lines of the novel, in which we see that something of Arctor remains in Bruce, because he realizes the New Path Farm is growing Substance D. This knowledge fulfills the conspiracy thread of the novel as more aligned with detective fiction than was formerly supposed. Fredric Jameson's argues that conspiracy theory represents the "poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age" which shows a "degraded figure of the total logic of late capital [in] a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system, whose failure is marked by its slippage [from form] into sheer theme and content" (“Cognitive Mapping” 356). The plot twist seems to shift from a critique of drugs (a reading which takes the “anti-drug” sentiment of the Author’s Note and, in my view, uncritically superimposes it over the novel) to a critique of capitalism. As Knight notes, Jameson’s “faith in a monolithic and ultimately determined totality itself has strong conspiratorial overtones” (20). In the novel, this final reveal shows the sheer magnitude of New Path’s corporate machinations, whose circular business model—a pun on “New Path”—goes as follows: grow, harvest, and sell Substance D to the general populace, then institutionalize those affected as patients in New Path clinics, and finally send the worst of these patients to New Path Farms to unwittingly produce more Substance D. In a moment of lucidity, Arctor “picked one of the stubbled blue plants, then placed it in his right shoe, slipping it down out of sight. A present for my friends, he thought, and looked forward inside his mind, where no one could see, to Thanksgiving” (*Scanner* 285). This passage indicates that some part of Arctor has survived, or been resurrected from, his spiritual-cognitive death (*mors ontologica*) and thus he may return as the savior/detective figure, whose suffering has enabled the exposure of the vast conspiracy surrounding the origins of Substance D. Although somewhat fantastical and seemingly

contrived, the end demonstrates the strange way “paranoia can link up with reality now and then, under very specialized conditions” (99). Dick’s fiction thus fulfills the utopian conditions of the literal pipe-dream of Donna’s friend, in which “there were no accidents: everything fitted together and happened on purpose, to achieve something—some goal in the future” (193). As Donna says of the vision which had “another world on the other side”: “It was a promise. Something to come. Something better a long time in the future” (194). In other words, the closing pages of the novel is also its opening; it undermines the darkly pessimistic, though humorous and irreverent, tone of the narrative by offering, or at least gesturing toward, a happy ending. In *Scanner*, Dick does for Arctor exactly what Arctor had hoped to do for his friends, which is to “at least mark their sad comings and goings, so they’ll be remembered. For a better day, later on, when people will understand” (229). And so, with this idealistic finale, which permits a possibility of Arctor’s restoration of self and return to the world, Dick grants symbolic amnesty to all the people, real and fictional, who “wanted to keep on having a good time forever” and “were punished entirely too much for what they did” (288, 287).

conclusion: the android, the addict, and the ant

I can feel a probing insect intelligence behind the camera.
(Burroughs, 1969: 21).

Comparing Philip K. Dick’s “The Electric Ant” (1969) and *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), allows for these dual articulations to be more coherently situated as counterparts in the cultural formation of American New Wave SF and drug counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. Grounding the textual productions in extratextual practices that speak to the relevant historical context gives the literary interpretation more critical acuity. In “The Electric Ant,” Dick’s “android” character arguably becomes ‘human’ through his practices of self-experimentation, and although Poole’s

“reality-supply construct” burns out in the process, he still may have glimpsed ultimate reality. Conversely, in *A Scanner Darkly*, Dick’s human character arguably becomes ‘android’ through his practices of drug addiction, and although Arctor’s identity is effaced in the process, he too may return victorious. The closure of “The Electric Ant” results from its brief opening onto the absolute, which for Poole means death or “the end of the mechanism”; whereas the opening in *A Scanner Darkly* appears from within its apparent closure, which for Arctor means surviving but as “a reflex machine, like an ant” (“Electric Ant” 111; *Scanner* 220). So, while in *A Scanner Darkly*, Dick is attentive to the ways that the human “can become—can, in fact, be made to become” android, in “The Electric Ant,” he theorizes the obverse process (“Man, Android, Machine” 200). This chiasmic structure, however, can be inverted as the reparative aspect of Poole’s entheogenic drug practices end in his death as a counterpoint to the paranoid aspect of Arctor’s recreational drug use which he survives. In any case, the texts position drug use as a catalyst for radical changes in each of the character’s experiences and understandings of ultimate notions like being, reality, and the absolute. A comparative analysis of the works facilitates an extended meditation on the psychophysiological limits that humans face in their confrontations with reality, while also indicating self-alteration and self-experimentation as methods of resistance that engender various risks and rewards. To repurpose language used by Hayles, “One way to frame these [twin narratives] is to see them as attempts to transgress and reinforce the boundaries of the subject” (xiii). Similarly, Lilly’s drug practices were conceived as a way to “complicate and fragment the idea of the self...[and to make] the self [more] robust and resilient” to external influences (““On modified human agents”” 100).

It is worth lingering over the title of “The Electric Ant,” as the word “ant” is the derogatory epithet that refers to “electric androids” like Poole, and also a pejorative characterization of Arctor, now called Bruce, in *A Scanner Darkly*, who is described as “an insect...like an ant” (“Electric

Ant” 101; *Scanner* 275). The word “ant” functions as a symbol of mechanistic entrapment in each of the narratives, but the ‘nature’ of this entrapment varies, as do the possibilities for escape. While an allegorical reading of Poole speculates on the ways in which allegedly autonomous individuals are largely determined by the limits of their “reality tunnels,” which can be widened through drug use, an analogous analysis of Arctor demonstrates the ways in which individuals can lose even this limited autonomy, which can be collapsed in drug addiction. In other words, clearly humans are not “exempt from the instincts that lower species obviously have,” as Dick argues, but presumably, these instincts do not wholly determine the full range of their interiority and actions, at least not for humans with a certain modicum of freedom (“Man, Android, Machine” 224). Dick summarizes what he sees as the distinction between nonfictional humans and nonmetaphorical ants as follows:

What is different about us is that ants, for instance, are disinhibited by the same signal, and the same behavior occurs; it is as if one ant again and again is involved, endlessly... [whereas for humans] each is a unique entelechy, and each receives unique sequences of signals—to which each responds uniquely. Still, this is the language of the universe that the ant hears; we thrill with a common joy (224).

Dick is likely referring to “the 1958 experiments” that myrmecologist Deborah Gordon critiques in *Ants at Work: How an Insect Society is Organized* (1999) (98). Lilly has “an unpublished paper from the 1950s” in which he claims that “neuroelectric stimulation of the brain could be used...to obtain ‘push-button control...directly of one brain over another’” (qtd. in ““On modified human agents”” 85). Similarly, Gordon says, in “the early days of research on chemical communication in ants,” scientists “hoped that ant behavior could be explained by finding the pheromones to which each species of ant would respond and cataloguing the response of each chemical”; however, more recent studies show “there is no one-to-one correspondence between a chemical and a response. Just as the same word can have different meaning in different situations...so the same chemical cue can elicit different responses in different social situations” (97). She explains that for “humans

and other social animals, an individual's behavior is always embedded in a social world" (96). The connection between ants and individuality, which Dick denies but Gordon affirms, is particularly relevant because of the longstanding association between ants and sociality. Eusocial insects, like ants, bees, wasps, and termites, are the only other species that compare to modern humans in terms of social organization, population density, and informational exchange. Early pulp SF depicted ant societies as ideal models that humans might do well to emulate because of their eusocial structure, which was able to organize collective living on a hugely-massive scale. The anti-collectivist, pro-individualist tendencies of post-WWII American ideology arguably shifted these earlier SF motifs of ant-as-idol to the well-known trope of ant-as-invader as the SF genre veered away from utopias toward dystopias during the second half of the 20th Century.⁶⁹ This concerns "metaphoric relations of insects to the psyche" found in modernity as "entomophobia" exposes "the production of the psyche as an object of knowledge reliant on an insect other" (Ahuja 131). Psychoanalysis uses entomology and evolutionary theory in some of its developmental analogies. While Jung "portrays gregarious insect life as an evolution of mechanistic social organization over primitive animal instinct," Freud "saw the organization of bees, ants, and termites as a model for human evolution from primitive to civilized states" (131). The "insect other" of the individual human psyche is the mindless body (reduction-downward), but then again, at the level of psychosocial structure, eusocial insects seem somehow "civilized" (reduction-upward) (131). In this rather confused way, "the theory of the psyche could alternatively produce the modern subject as a sign of suppressed or displaced insect instinct or compare developed, 'civilized' psychic traits as evidence of evolutionary processes coexistent in insect life" (131).

⁶⁹ Although the pulp SF utopian ant tropes predate the 1966 designation of ants as "eusocial insects," the prefix "eu" from "eutopia" is a rather telling modifier considering the dystopic turn more aligned with "outopia" that would follow in the wake of World War II. The shift in the cultural imaginary surrounding "ants" reflects changing ideas about the "nature" of human society (a veritable contradiction in terms) and its relation to the individual in the modern period.

Ant science aside, what Dick is explicating here, at least in relation to my reading of the figure of the android and the addict, is related to the notion of ants and individuality. Poole undoes his “ant-like” programming of “repeating his last instruction” through entheogenic drug use, which expands his perspective at least momentarily before he escapes in death; whereas Arctor destroys everything except his “ant-like” programming through recreational drug addiction, which reduces him to “an insect that clacks and vibrates in a closed circle forever” (*Scanner* 245, 275). Dick’s SF thus depicts drugs as new technologies of consciousness with the power to either expand and/or destroy what Dick terms the “authentically human” (“Android and Human” 202). Still, this reading of Arctor-Bruce as deficient in individuality from a sort of mind-extermination fails to reintegrate ideology as having similar effects or to acknowledge affect as a marker of the authentically human. This requires re-reading Fred-Arctor with Arctor-Bruce; Fred is not only deficient with respect to individuality, but he is also affectively absent. Mike, when talking to Donna, reflects, “why Bob Arctor—No, he thought; I always have to think of him as Bruce. Otherwise I cop out to knowing too much: things I shouldn’t, couldn’t, know. Why Bruce thought so much of her. Thought when he was incapable of thought” (*Scanner* 213). The text describes Fred-Arctor in the terms of “the android” more than the so-called “reflex machine” which *others* imagine to be Arctor-Bruce: “Fred’s voice is like one of those robot computer voices...perfectly toneless and artificial” (20). Upon receiving orders from his superior to surveille Arctor and unable to contest them, “Fred made a strangled, robot-like noise” (48). This shows that even in *Scanner*, drug use is not just a way of becoming, but also a way of escaping the already “ant-like” or “robot-like” aspect of the practice of everyday life. The communication of ideology ‘works’ as a social control. This reading of *Scanner* shows that Arctor-as-Fred is not all that different from Arctor-as-Bruce; however, the ideological imperatives that delimit the former are further literalized and biologized in the

neurological impairments that define the latter, at least *to us* and in the social world of the novel. Arctor-as-Fred, of course, still has recourse to being Arctor in the drug underworld, while Arctor-as-Bruce has been institutionalized and lost most of his memories of himself as Arctor. But his recovery—though not the one the rehabilitation intends—of this identity is not foreclosed by the novel and is foreshadowed. The key difference in Arctor-as-Fred and Arctor-as-Bruce is that the former is forced to be devoid of real affect in the service of cognitively ‘passing’ as a ‘functioning’ member of the social body, whereas the latter, though stripped of ‘cognitive function’ to serve as a part of the capitalist machine, is still alive to real affect. To be ‘Fred’ is to be false forever; to be ‘Bruce’ is simply to be at least for now. Bruce thus appears as more “authentically human” than Fred in his preservation of real affect, and unlike Arctor’s affect, even in the hostile and horrible circumstances of New Path, it is intensely and immensely good. Which is not to say that Bruce’s ‘good’ affect will not eventually register on a social level as ‘dysfunctional affect,’ because the novel’s ending suggests that his new undercover status—unknown even to him—will take down New Path’s conspiratorial corporation. The affect is not ‘good’ because of a moral or social ‘function,’ it simply is ‘good’ in the sense of its focus on “Donna’s touch,” when he’ll see “his friends,” and giving them “a gift” at “Thanksgiving.” What survives from his double-life as Arctor-Fred is not “disgust” and “hatred” of the “detested straights,” but a love and longing for the “dope degenerates.” The “horror” at quitting drugs and losing his friends or not quitting drugs and losing his mind is displaced by the hope that having lost his friends and his mind, he’ll someday get back to them at least in a partial, or even temporary, way. Hope survives horror. Somehow outlives it.

The ant colony seems an appropriate analogy for the reality tunnels that structure human experience; there are a many tunnels going in different directions, but each and all are contained within one unassailable larger framework. The response of both of Dick’s protagonists to being

trapped in their respective systems is overwhelmingly paranoid in nature. It is worth pausing to acknowledge that the paranoid response is not the only one available, as Dick himself implies when he says, “still, this is the language of the universe that the ant hears; we thrill with a common joy” (224). Gordon makes a similar comment, explaining that “an ant’s experience is mostly chemical and tactile” as it is “aware only of what reaches its antennae,” which means, “ants move around to tune in to the world” (102). These comments demonstrate a more reparative response to finding oneself embedded within a larger system, but I argue the systems from which Arctor and Poole try to escape are principally social, rather than mechanical or biological, which their bodily markers of android and addict only appear to suggest more literally. Yet in another way, I am suggesting an even more literal stratum, one that describes the general processes found in natural systems on a molecular level. This second reading is demonstrated by Gordon’s work with neural networks, or “parallel distributed process model[s]” (143). Drawing an “analogy between colonies and brains,” she explains, “in both systems, relatively simple units (ants or neurons), using local cues, can achieve complex, global behavior,” and “in such models, the individual units are usually called ‘neurons,’” but Gordon “imagined each unit as an ant” (143). Dick’s half-baked idea of ant behavior like Lilly’s ill-conceived ideas on mind control are just that; Gordon’s ant communication

is not a deterministic process even at the individual level. An ant does not respond the same way every time to the same stimulus; nor do colonies. Some events influence the probabilities that certain ants will perform certain tasks, and this regularity leads to predictable tendencies rather than deterministic outcomes (139).

All “living organisms are continually engaged...in processes of speculative extrapolation and experimentation” (Shaviro 14). Gordon continues, “we speak of ‘model systems’ [but] one natural system cannot represent another” (169). It cannot be abstracted because “the pattern of interaction, not a signal in the interaction itself, produces the effect”; “the signal is in the pattern

of contact” (169). The lesson from ants is “that to understand a system like theirs, it is not sufficient to take the system apart” because “the behavior of each unit is not encapsulated inside that unit but comes from its connections with the rest of the system” (168). Like Arctor’s connections to Donna.

In closing, Arctor’s caught in arbitrary structures ushering him into mostly fast-food joints; “it didn’t make any difference...where you went; there was always the same McDonaldburger place over and over, like a circular strip that turned past you as you pretended to go somewhere” (*Scanner* 29). Similarly, Poole realizes that he is fixed within “a grid screen that cuts [him] off from certain thoughts, certain actions. And forces [him] into others” (“Electric Ant” 103). An acute sense of entrapment leads both characters to confront the question as to whether the collapse of their reality tunnels is preferable to enduring confinement within its walls. Behind this dystopic depiction of reality as an ant farm is the utopian desire to escape the “disciplined mobilization” of everyday life and buck the perfunctory requirements of rote existence (Grossberg 398). However, whereas Poole allegorically engages in entheogenic drug use as a way to test the limits of reality, Arctor engages in recreational drug use as a way to soften its edges. And although each attempt an escape, the intention shifts from experimentation in the pursuit of knowledge to recreation in the pursuit of pleasure. The former, associated with Lilly, has more utopic potential than the latter, associated with Burroughs, because of its ability to sustain a dialectical relation to reality as such. Still, the risks are common to each method, as Poole dies finding himself in an allegorical overdose and Arctor literally loses himself in prolonged addiction. If one can only asymptotically approach an “outside” through death or psychosis, does this negate the attempt? Not entirely, I suggest, as Poole and Arctor achieve not only rebellion against reality as such, but also glean some insights along the way. The journey, whether cosmic, psychic, or otherwise, has value, even if it is only upon the return that its transformative potential can be fully realized. Furthermore, it is possible to

see crossing over death's threshold into the great unknown as the vital exploratory mission. Undeniably, "preoccupation with mortality" of the stories reveal "the boundary between life and death" as the "ultimate ontological boundary" of postmodernist fiction (McHale 261). Certainly, then, New Wave SF, in Dick's drug narratives, supports the claim: "death, not space, is the final frontier of the imagination, beyond which only the most innovative adventurers boldly go" (267). McCarthy's necronautical manifesto says, "death *is* a type of space," or, in cryptic Burroughsian Mayan codices, "death needs time for what it kills to grow in," "all out of time and into space," and "we're here to go" (*Minutes to Go*). He explains: "The Assassins of Hassan I Sabbah did not fear torture... 'Will they hang you?' 'Oh yes,' he answers. 'But I won't be there'" (*Last Words* 143).

Chapter Three

Cults

I. ron hubbard: dianetics and scientology of the 1950s—

Dianetics, (di.a.net'.ics, noun.): A system for the analysis, control and development of human thought evolved from a set of coordinated axioms which also provide techniques for the treatment of a wide range of mental disorders and organic diseases: term and doctrines introduced by L. Ron Hubbard, American engineer. (from Gr. dianoetikos-dia, di-.a.net'.ic, adj.)

In May of 1950, Dianetics debuted in a short article published in John W. Campbell's pulp fiction magazine, *Astounding Science Fiction*, entitled, "Dianetics: The Evolution of a Science" (the book-length version from 1950 was called *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*). In this shorter piece, L. Ron Hubbard sums up the main points and principles of Dianetics, saying, "it offers a glimmer of hope that Man may continue his process of evolution toward a higher organism" instead of "straying toward the danger point of his own destruction" ("Dianetics" 86). On the final page, he clarifies this statement, and suggests that science and SF should turn toward inner space, which has been bewitched, and which is also, paradoxically, where there are the stars:

The black enchantment is slavery. Man's effort to enslave man so that man can be free. Wrong equation. That's the black enchantment. We've a magic word to break it and a science to be applied. Up there are the stars. Down in the arsenal is an atom bomb. Which one is it going to be? (87).⁷⁰

⁷⁰ This is not a reference to American slavery. Hubbard directly addresses another SF author in the previous paragraph, saying "I am truly sorry, Eric Frank Russel, that the black enchantment of Earth didn't turn out to be a sinister barrier for your sake. But it's a black enchantment all the same," which are "social and personal aberrations, traveling from Egypt's time and before, piling higher and higher" ("Dianetics" 87). Erik Frank Russel's *Sinister Barrier* (1943) is SF novel; the title refers to the "sinister barrier of our [sensory] limitations," beyond which lurk "invisibly preying" alien entities "who really own the Earth!" (63). "Skulls in the Stars" (1929) is a horror short story by Robert E. Howard published in *Weird Tales*, in which a Puritan protagonist battles a dark creature; its title derives from the line: "Death! Death! There are skulls in the Stars!" (55). The New Wave reading of this, of course, is that the stars are in our skulls.

In a 1952 lecture, Hubbard says that he's "trying to tell [us] a fairy tale," which he wrote up as a short story where what he calls "the black enchantment" refers to black magic and the occult as a metaphor for the affliction of modern "madness" that has left individuals terribly unsatisfied and nations needlessly destructive, but which he also claims derives from a Chinese legend concerning "a black enchantment lying over the whole world—some wicked magician had put this black enchantment over everyone so that no one could be happy anymore"; he explains that the way of stopping people from seeing this dark indoctrination was to "divide them within themselves" ("Phoenix Lecture"). Hubbard describes the bleak outlook, saying, "Here was your fear of death. Here was your shut-off of knowledge of past lives. Here is your fear, [your] incompetence" (ibid.). Hubbard's inward turn in Dianetics is an important precursor to the New Wave, although his earlier fiction was very much in the pulp adventure tradition of the previous generic wave, also known as Golden Age SF. In the brief introduction to "Dianetics," Joseph A. Winter, M.D., talks about how "Dianetics is, in addition to all its other attributes, a thrilling adventure...exploring in the most obscure *terra incognita* of all the human mind...a region wherein lies the mightiest power in the known universe" ("Dianetics" 43, emphasis in original). Of course, this relates to the invisible landscapes of inner space, but also predates their formulation as such in the New Wave of SF. Winter says Hubbard's "discovery of the true nature of this wonderful device, the Human Mind," provides answers, which are "engineering answers, developed not by metaphysical word-juggling, but by an engineer's approach to a specific, defined problem" (44). In *Barefaced Messiah: The True Story of L. Ron Hubbard* (1987), journalist Russel Miller somewhat differently characterizes Hubbard's self-help program, the techniques of which are included in what would be the best-selling book, *Dianetics* (1950): "Artfully employing the jargon of modern technology," Hubbard devised a therapy that he called "auditing" (Russel 157). The objective was to "become 'clear' of

all engrams, [as] ‘clears’ [had no] neuroses and psychoses...greatly raised IQs and...perfect memories” (ibid.). Hubbard was nothing if not extremely adept at synthesizing the proliferating new vocabularies that were being introduced into the public sphere as part a new vernacular of the 20th Century—from classical psychoanalysis, first-wave cybernetics, computational theory of mind, and computer science to practical economics, business accounting, how-to manuals, popular SF, new media and technology—all of which he put into the service of his unique blend of neologisms and ideas paired with already familiar concepts in a new brand of do-it-yourself psychotherapy. More critically, there are deep resonances across *Blindsight*, Scientology, and Hubbard’s journals when put alongside the *Parable* books, Earthseed, and Butler’s journals, which I draw out to find the throughlines between these seemingly unrelated cult figures and their respective cult projects.⁷¹

In a newspaper article, “Burroughs on Scientology” (1970), William S. Burroughs declares his own liberal commitments in denouncing the cult’s conservative politics. He writes this expose to clarify his views to the youth that may have been influenced by his other writings as he himself had been a practicing Scientologist during most of the 1960s (though more of a solitary figure making use of the techniques than a full-fledged member of the religious cult). Burroughs asserts, however, his continued belief in and use of certain practices of Dianetics and Scientology although he is also in direct conflict with the Church of Scientology as an established institution. Burroughs claims the cult’s organizational policies have “prevented” Scientology from receiving the “serious consideration merited by the importance of Mr. Hubbard’s discoveries” (*Naked Scientology* 64).⁷²

The reason for this is in part the recruitment structure, which is based on monetary contributions

⁷¹ In Canavan’s overview of the archival materials, after abandoning *Blindsight* (1978-1987), Butler began to work on *God of Clay* (1989-1993), which has “alternate and fragmentary versions of *Parable of the Sower*”; after publishing *Parable of the Sower* (1993), she continued on *God of Clay* (1993-1996), which has “abandoned sketches, alternate scenes, and discarded drafts from...*Parable of the Talents*” (123). My work shows Butler didn’t exactly abandon what she had started in *Blindsight* but did a massive overhaul of the content to preserve the major themes—most obviously, cults—in a more reparative mode. In other words, I see *Blindsight* as part of the same project as the *Parable* duology.

⁷² Russel’s expose on Hubbard, *Barefaced Messiah*, is clearly an allusion to Burroughs’s writing in *Naked Scientology*.

and paid courses; the ‘tech’ of Scientology is not meant to be available to those outside the formal organization. This limits what Burroughs sees as the real potential of Hubbard’s research. As Alec Nevala-Lee, author of *Astounding: John W. Campbell, Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, L. Ron Hubbard, and the Golden Age of Science Fiction* (2018), wrote in response to rumors of Hubbard, prior to Dianetics or Scientology, saying “the best way to make money would be to start a religion”:

It's likely that Hubbard did say at one point or another that the best way to make money would be to start your own religion...there are multiple witnesses who state that [he] said that the best way to make money would be to start a religion (Reddit, AMA, r/books).

However, as Burroughs testifies, “some of the techniques are highly valuable and warrant further study and experimentation,” because “the E-Meter is a useful device” (*Naked Scientology* 64). He insists, “It must be acknowledged that Hubbard has developed a technique for doing this that warrants the study of non-Scientologists. He has in fact developed a system of biofeedback brain control based on the E-Meter” (87). Despite his stated interest in the auditing methods developed by Hubbard, Burroughs continues, saying, “Certainly it is time for the Scientologists to come out in plain English on one side or the other...Which side are you on Hubbard, which side are you on? (65). As Moylan says, the value of 1960s and 1970s American SF is in part that it “asks one of the key political questions of the time: ‘Which side are you on?’” (*Scraps of the Untainted Sky* 55). This significant question forms a cross-linking connecting Burroughs as a cult figure of New Wave and the counterculture to Hubbard as a cult leader in a New Age culture that took a different tack. The fact that Burroughs has publicly challenged Hubbard to answer what Moylan later refers to as the political question of the time shows how unlike some New Wave writers, Burroughs upholds the oppositional and revolutionary political stance that is associated with New Wave SF at times wrongfully. “Butler’s earliest notes on [*Blindsight*], from December 1978,” indicate “the narrative emphasis of the book will be on cults, and Aaron as a cult leader,” a character who was “based on

power-seeking men...The same notes go on to link such men to both preaching and fascism, even suggesting that Adolf Hitler himself was such a man” (Canavan 81). Burroughs likewise mentions, “Mr. Hubbard’s overtly fascist utterances,” and cites a dictatorial quality to the group leadership, in which “Scientologists are not prepared to accept intelligent and sometimes critical evaluation. They demand unquestioning acceptance” (*Naked Scientology* 65). Butler explains that “[Olamina] was a power-seeking character” and she’d learned “not to trust power-seekers” (qtd. in Canavan 171). Put in dialogue with descriptions of her writing, the *Parable* books can be seen as thinking through power from both sides: as Butler has said, “I began writing about power because I had so little” (qtd. in Canavan 3). When talking to Cobb, Butler also discusses “the way Lauren’s position as a black woman complicated her power-seeking” (“Interview with Octavia Butler” 204). When placed in the context of Butler’s work the decade prior on Aaron as a “power-seeking [white man],” the complex relation to Lauren as a “power-seeking [black woman]” begins to come to the surface.

The “Admissions of L. Ron Hubbard” were written between 1946 and 1947, a few years before the publication of *Dianetics* (1950) and *Scientology* (1952) (Reitman 20; Russel 79). The so-called “Admissions,” which the Church of Scientology has vehemently denied and attempted to suppress, read more like affirmations, and are reflective of Hubbard’s abiding interest in the practice of self-hypnosis and personal writing undertaken in the interest of healing old wounds and growing toward new goals. While Scientology has disavowed these deeply private journal entries, presumably to avoid public embarrassment and ridicule from the prying eyes of non-members, the actual content of the document is profoundly humanizing in relation to Hubbard (and nothing to be embarrassed about). Admitting insecurities, uncertainties, tendencies, and predilections, as well as affirming strengths, objectives, intentions, and ambitions to oneself could not be more aligned with the best aspects of the therapeutic enterprise set out in *Dianetics*. Butler herself engaged in

similar practices of self-hypnosis and written affirmations to likewise achieve her aims and aspirations. Hubbard's stated intent for his self-hypnosis exercises with written affirmations was to conduct an "experiment" in which the objective "[was] to re-establish the ambition, willpower, desire *to survive*, the talent and confidence of myself" (qtd. in Reitman 20, emphasis mine). One of Hubbard's journal entries reflects on his slippages between personal facts and quixotic fictions:

You can tell all the romantic tales you wish...But you know which ones were lies...You have enough real experience to make anecdotes forever. Stick to your true adventures. Tell nothing discreditable...Or if you wish, as you will, tell adventures which happened to others. People accept them better ("Admissions" 16).

Although Hubbard has a reputation for being a compulsive liar and a bit of a braggart, Butler's personal journal entries also evidence a pattern that slips across the real and the fantastical, mixing her life with her life's work, and vice versa. As Canavan observes, "commonly in her journals she writes as if the Shaar stories were all actually true, mingling the events in the stories with events in her real life as if there were no difference between the two; she would keep this private habit up in her personal journals for decades" (19). In diaries "from her teens and twenties," Butler would often write to herself as "Shar," "Shaari," or "Mishaari" (123).⁷³ Importantly, I'd add that Butler's published writing also uses altered versions of these same names, such as "Valerie Rye" in "Speech Sounds" (1983) and "Shori" in *Fledgling* (2006). Not unlike the tendency cited in and by Hubbard, another "long sequence from the mid-1970s [is] characteristic of Butler's journals from the period in that it seems to slide freely between actual and invented experiences" (31). Butler's "journals and story notes [were both] typically in the form of first-person narratives written by her own

⁷³ Although I assumed the name—"Mishaari"—was sound-based before thinking it was a near-anagram of Maharishi, mishaari is also a traditional Somali dish made from wheat or rice that is highly nutritious. This seems to connect to the wheat stalk symbol Valerie Rye wears and to the focus on Acorn bread in the *Parable* books and perhaps even to the wheat in the biblical parable of the weeds and the wheat. Writing as sustenance and food for thought come to mind.

characters,” almost as if these personalities were somehow alternates of her own (19). These unusual writing behaviors evidence the creative process as deeply personal, and even lead one to wonder if hyperempathy, which allows one to slide into the subject position of others, might be a metafictional condition that describes Butler herself. She did at times describe Lauren (or Olamina) as “super-me—the me I wish I was” (qtd. in Canavan 146).

Like Campbell, Hubbard, and Burroughs, “[Butler] was similarly fascinated by the pseudosciences of telepathy and ESP” (19). In other writings, Butler even talks about “working to develop her own psi powers; she took a self-hypnosis class in high school and used variations on the techniques she learned there in self-affirmation regimens for the rest of her life” (19). Butler’s self-affirmations and personal mantras would later “take the form of tiny poems, from which she would borrow for the interstitial poetry in the Parable books” (19). The fact that *Earthseed* and its verses were seeded in Butler’s own practices of self-help, self-hypnosis, self-affirmation appears as a rather striking parallel to Hubbard. His early practices of self-help, self-affirmation, and self-hypnosis would form the foundation for what would later become Dianetics, and then Scientology.⁷⁴ When read together, Hubbard and Butler’s self-affirmations reveal a shared interest in prompting their own writing. In self-hypnosis, the process ‘works’ by instilling new habits of thought and introducing new ways of feeling through the use of repetition, routine, and rewording. A selection of their early journal entries documents these two very different literary and cultural figures in a shared attempt to modulate negative anxieties and incite positive behaviors. Hubbard’s version is: “You will make fortunes in writing. Any book you care to write now will sell high and well” (“Admissions” 12). Analogously, Butler writes: “I am a Bestselling Writer,” “I write Bestselling Books and...short stories” (qtd. in Canavan 19). Canavan says, “[Butler’s] attempts to

⁷⁴ In *Ethics* (1940-1943), Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, “Jesus Christ said of Himself: ‘I am the life’ (John 14.6 and 11.25),” which he describes as a “self-affirmation of Jesus” (214).

hypnotize herself and to will herself to sell books” form a visible pattern “across her personal journals”; for example, “she writes down—twice a day every day between February and April 1970—her goal to have \$100,000 by January 1, 1975” (Canavan 36-37). Other personal mantras Butler developed include: “So be it, see to it!” and “Contract!” (qtd. in Canavan 19). “‘Enjoy this one,’ [Butler] reminds herself in one of her affirmative sticky notes she would place around her house as encouragement. ‘Love your readers. Say Yes!’” (qtd. in Canavan 154). Hubbard also has some very positive self-affirmations, such as “You are light and you are good,” “You are courteous and gentle,” and a bit sadly, “You are honest and proud of your honesty. You are too powerful to cheat” (“Admissions” 11, 19, 16). Another reframes survival in more reparative terms than survivalism: “To survive you need only do these things—be patient, calm, beautiful. Write what you yourself think is good and worthy” (20). My personal favorite, “Criticism does not affect you emotionally,” and, “These words sink into your whole being. They remake your entire life. They are your code, belief, your guiding star” (18, 16). More sadly, after Butler’s mother died of a stroke in 1996, “her private journals show her repeating Olamina’s maxims back to herself, as a way of processing her grief: ‘God is change, and in the end, God prevails,’” which evidences Butler’s real use in her own life of the Earthseed verses as a practical mode of consciousness alteration (qtd. in Canavan 142). Keegan Osinski’s “‘Only Actions’: Ritual and the Embodied Processing of Trauma in *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*” (2021) talks about how “the creation of rituals...served as an important spiritual-religious response to the trauma” members of the cult had experienced (99). Robert Scaer, a neurologist, says that “trauma cannot be cured by word and cognitive processing alone. The sensory experiences of the body must be introduced in *the ritualistic extinction* of the brain/body traumatic connection” (“Neurophysiology” 58, emphasis mine.) The “beliefs about God as change” create a new brain/body connection with the “physical

practices of the religion,” Osinski argues, because, as it says in one Earthseed verse, “Worship is no good without action” (Osinski 107; *Sower* 219). The ritualistic extinction of the brain-body—or “bodymind”—traumatic connection is necessarily the extant survival—or the ritualistic resurrection—of something else.⁷⁵

Hubbard’s unpublished “Admissions” refer to another unpublished manuscript from 1938, “The One Command” (also known as “Excalibur” or “Dark Sword”); however, it seems that “Ron’s fellow writers were [not] aware of the existence of the book, with the exception of Art Burks” (Reitman 20; Russel 79).⁷⁶ According to Russel’s interview with Burks as to its purported contents,

Burks’s recollection of the manuscript was that it was about seventy thousand words long and began with a fable about a king who gathered all his wise men together and commanded them to bring him all the wisdom of the world in five hundred books. He then told them to go away and condense the information into one hundred books. When they had done that, he wanted the wisdom reduced into one book and finally into one word. That word was ‘*survive*’ (Russel 80, emphasis mine).

A united thread between Hubbard’s Scientology and Olamina’s Earthseed is the focus on survival in a religion that repurposes evolutionary discourse within the new context of their respective cults.

⁷⁵ In *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women’s Speculative Fiction* (2018), Sami Schalk articulates black feminism and disability studies using the critical concept of the bodymind that Margaret Price devised in theorizing body and mind as fundamentally relational entities that cannot be separated. Schalk argues that “processes within our being impact one another in such a way that the notion of a physical versus mental process is difficult, if not impossible to clearly discern in most cases” (269). Schalk applies this concept to *Parable of the Sower*, specifically to *hyperempathy*, which Butler describes as a “delusion,” “disorder,” “disability,” and/or “syndrome” that Lauren “can’t shake because it’s kind of biologically programmed into her” (qtd. in Potts 333). She also doesn’t want to “shake” it and rejects being “fixed” with various pharmaceuticals that Bankole suggests she take in the first novel.

⁷⁶ As Canavan bemoans of the published *Parable of the Talents* when compared to the unpublished notes and drafts “Butler hardly describes the process at all: she jumps from a diary entry of 2035 to one in 2090—entirely skipping over the interesting years of the original ‘Dark Olamina’ in the process—so Earthseed’s rise to national prominence gets only a few sentences” (178). Obviously, “Dark Olamina” bears some relation to the alternate title of Hubbard’s unpublished “Dark Sword.” This may be a reference to Jesus’ words in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible, in which he says, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). This idea of the sword has a nonliteral meaning in other sections as seen in the following example: “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him” which is followed shortly after by “there are those whose teeth are swords, whose teeth are knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mortals” (Proverbs 30:5, 30:14). So, we have the idea of the word as a weapon that can be used for disparate ends. The means of the speaking or writing of parables is more akin to koans or cut-ups, I argue, than it is to standard language use. The word that is virus is also a means of inoculation. The seed can yield wheat, or weeds.

Survival and evolutionary theory form the thematic core of these very different real and fictional cults, which each take popular discourse on evolutionary science and transform it in the language of their new religious movements. Angela Rovak's 2019 Modern Language Association (MLA) presentation, "Written on our Genes: Locating the Ancestor in Octavia Butler's *Blindsight*," argued that archival materials found in "The Blindsight Manuscript" (1984) locate a transitional period in Butler's thinking on genetic lineage. Rovak used archival research from the Huntington Library to inform her reading of Butler's theory of biopower, which she argues began in *Kindred* (1979) but was fully developed in *Dawn* (1987). Rovak gave an overview of Butler's unpublished drafts of *Blindsight* (1980-1987) in the context of her dissertation on epigenetics. In early notes from 1977 and 1978, Butler indicated that Aaron's cult "worships essence," biopolitically defined as "material aspects of genetics and inheritance" (Rovak 3). Unlike Aaron's religion in *Blindsight*, then, which worships "immortal flesh," Lauren's religion of Earthseed "works toward noneugenic human biological evolution" (Rovak 1; Morris 271). In *Blindsight*, the eugenics aspect does not proceed via population extermination, and isn't a major part of the story, but is more like some of Butler's earlier novels which have a sort of selective breeding of those perceived to be genetically 'better' than other people. Still, the preservation of ancestral bloodlines thought to be 'superior' is meant to ensure the survival of certain hereditary traits within a subset of the human species, which is a type of controlled evolution. Aaron's "psychometry" (telepathy-through-touch) is counterweight to Lauren's "hyperempathy" (empathy-through-sight). The twin "powers" are ambiguous as "real" delusions, yet they spur their real use of cultic writings and reading practices as consciousness alteration. Lauren's *hyperempathy* and *Earthseed verses* stand-in as Butler's writerly "powers" in metafictional; Aaron's *psychometry* and *ancestry readings* are like Hubbard's e-meter and auditing techniques. He also calls it an "*electropsychometer*" in a recorded 1952 lecture ("How to Audit").

Other aspects of Hubbard can also be seen as creating a mirror-image of what Butler would imagine for the Parable books, as one of his journal entries, “You can consciously stop pain” is the exact opposite of Butler’s cult leader’s hyperempathy (“Admissions” 12). Hubbard’s self-auditing research was also said to have given him “total recall”—a term specifically used in Dianetics to describe becoming “clear” through “auditing”—of all his past lives (*Dianetics* 87, 105; *Have You Lived Before This Life?*). Although the introduction of past lives didn’t debut until Scientology, the following excerpt shows that it has deep roots in Hubbard’s own thinking: “You recall all your past times on earth. You have and will live forever” (“Admissions” 22). This resembles Butler’s notes and drafts for *Blindsight* in which the cult leader, “Aaron,” can perform “ancestry readings” to travel back on genetic time-tracks and into the previous lives of himself and of others (Rovak 3). Burroughs similarly comments on these practices of recall and “reverie,” which he also gives an extended literary gloss of in *The Ticket That Exploded* (1967), saying, “These film glimpses will occur in auditing. I don’t say you are remembering another life but you are remembering something” (*Dianetics* 113; *Naked Scientology* 85). Aaron’s ambiguous powers of “psychometry” and “ancestor readings” directly allude to Hubbard’s real practices of self-auditing that he claimed enabled him to go back on his own “genetic time-track” (Rovak 3; Russel 205). In one of these experiences, Hubbard is alleged to have become his own father during intercourse with his mother while he was being conceived, a scene which Butler reproduces almost verbatim with Aaron in *Blindsight* (Rovak). As Canavan points out, “in one version of the novel Aaron and Davis briefly replace Kyna with Aaron’s own mother as the third member of the sexual triad,” which replicates the idea of being oneself and one’s father during one’s own conception (200). Eventually, there is a third character “Rev. Davis,” who “is ultimately drawn into the love story as a third member of a now-queer, now-polyamorous triad; a book outline from 1984 lays out the terms of this unusual

union in which the three are ‘joined strangely, irrevocably’ and must now be together to be ‘complete,’ despite their phobic response to the bisexual and polyandrous nature of their triad” (82-83). Again, coinciding with some of Butler’s own interests in her fiction as well as with some of Hubbard’s early journals, this *Blindsight* narrative seems to be riffing off an entry which reads: “You have forgotten the case histories of Havelock Ellis. They did not surfeit you. You have forgotten them...Only women thrill you and very deeply” (“Admissions” 19, 20).⁷⁷ In regard to what is also a masculinist characteristic of hard SF, “Thomas Disch has one of the more notorious analyses” in “The Embarrassments of Science Fiction” (2005), in which he “discusses...the militarism, fascism, and repressed sexuality in texts such as Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*” (Taylor 625). As another explanation of the sexual triad experience described above, both a scene in *Blindsight* and a story of Hubbard’s, Russel summarizes what *Dianetics* (1950) and *Scientology: A History of Man* (1952) said about auditing courses and what to expect in these therapy sessions:

‘Dianetic reverie’... could apparently be recognized by a fluttering of the closed eyelids. It was not so much a hypnotic trance, he was careful to point out, as a state of relaxation conducive to travelling back along the time-track. Once the reverie had been induced, the auditor placed the pre-clear back in various periods of his life, moving...towards birth or conception. Most pre-clears, Hubbard advised, would eventually experience a ‘sperm dream’ during which, as an egg, they would swim up a channel to meet the sperm (157).

As Canavan says, “Blindsight was to be a departure from Butler’s typical patterns. It had a male protagonist, which Butler had not attempted since the original *Patternmaster*” (81). He briefly goes over some differences from her other works: “Rather than telepaths, *Blindsight* concerned what she called psychometry: the psionic ability to learn facts about a person or an object through

⁷⁷ Havelock Ellis was a psychologist and sexologist who wrote on topics generally considered to be unacceptable and taboo at the time. Hubbard’s quotation appears to refer to his work *Sexual Inversion* (1900); the book was primarily comprised of case studies written in the first-person by successful, homosexual professionals of the period. Access to the text in the U.S. context was limited to medical professionals until the obscenity laws changed in 1935 to allow its sale to the general public (“Ellis, Havelock.” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*).

the sense of touch. It was in essence an entirely new type of narrative for Butler, one more properly a ‘supernatural thriller’ in the Stephen King mold than science fiction” (81). What Canavan misses in his approximately two-pages of discussion of *Blindsight* is most everything of importance.⁷⁸ For starters, Aaron’s last name is Taylor, and not only is he set apart by being “a male protagonist,” he’s also “white” (Rovak 1). In addition, Aaron’s “psychometry” is not a neologism, as Canavan says, as in Lauren’s “hyperempathy; it is a citation of historical beliefs and religious practices of psychometry—or token object reading—which involve the touching of a personal item in order to tell something of its history of contact. The idea is that a person’s energy makes an impression on everything that they touch, allowing the object reader to connect with them. The difficulty arises, both in the unpublished novel and in the real practice, in the act of interpretation, which requires doing a reading that is at the same time a (re)writing of what has been ‘read.’ The notion of *Blindsight* as a “supernatural thriller” is again a bit of a misnomer, and though it is “an entirely new type of narrative for Butler,” the ‘newness’ or ‘novum’ is closer to a fictionalized biography of American cultic and magical practices which have a historicity that is, at least in Canavan, unacknowledged (except for a single parenthetical which says “later notes soon add the Rev. Jim Jones and Charles Manson to...[a] list of possible inspirations” for Aaron) (81).⁷⁹ Another journal

⁷⁸ Canavan explains his two-page summary of *Blindsight* by saying: “My own work on this project becomes a very tiny footnote in this story. After excerpting a small portion of this book in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* in summer 2014, I received an email from Morgan S. Brilliant, who worked at Ace Science Fiction in the late 1980s. My role as a scholar working in the archive had been misreported in one media outlet, leaving the impression that I have some connection to or control over the Butler literary estate. (Alas, I do not.) That’s why Brilliant wrote to me. She recalls discovering a copy of *Blindsight* at Ace while moving offices, and contacting Butler to see what she wanted to do with it. ‘She told me that she had withdrawn the book from submission because she was no longer interested in seeing it published. She asked me to be certain that it was not published. I don’t know whether there is a copy in her papers. If so, I ask that you please respect her wishes regarding *Blindsight*’” (84-85).

⁷⁹ In Rovak’s MLA Presentation, I noted the almost word-for-word similarities between Hubbard’s auditing story of traveling back to become his own father whilst being conceived and the scene she described from “The *Blindsight Manuscript*” (1984), to which she replied that she had actually noticed Butler’s marginal scrawls of L. Ron Hubbard’s name in the archival manuscript. Canavan seems to have entirely missed this extremely significant influence and obvious inspiration (and literal namesake) for *Blindsight* (and Aaron) in his scholarly work, *Octavia E. Butler* (2016). I also commented on the parallel between the two cults of *Blindsight* and *Earthseed*, and their respective powers, but Rovak responded that she not yet familiar with the Parable duology and could only speak to my interest through hers

entry of Hubbard's lends textual support to the historical relationship between Butler's white male cult leader, Aaron, and L. Ron Hubbard's real interest in the actual practice of token object reading, which, as already noted, is known as psychometry:

All objects are your friends. You can ask from and receive past history of any object. No part of that history affects you emotionally or psychically. The past of objects cannot harm you ("Admissions" 21).

I argue that Butler takes the idea behind "psychometry" and transforms it through an Earthseed aphorism. Larkin opens *Parable of the Talents* with one of "the first of [Earthseed's] verses," which reads: "All that you touch / You Change. / All that you Change / Changes you. / The only lasting truth / Is Change. / God / Is Change" (3). Larkin's commentary, always cynical, is nevertheless instructive for reading Butler's SF project; she says, "The words are harmless, I suppose, and metaphorically true. At least she began with some species of truth" (3). The crucial points, I argue, are in Larkin's claim that these words are "metaphorically true," and that they represent "some species of truth" (3). Although scholarship on genetics and epigenetics has investigated these verses for their 'literal' (meaning 'scientific') truth, the 'literary' (meaning 'religious') question posed by the titular biblical parables is what it means for something to be "metaphorically true" (3). The biblical parables align with New Wave SF as not merely 'metaphorical,' but as a different kind of 'literal.' The directionality of the literality is, of course, literary, but not necessarily fictive; the inward turn of the SF genre in the New Wave is a (re)turn to the 'real' of inner space. Moreover, positioning Olamina's verses as "some species of truth" shifts away from discourse on biology and

(i.e., in the epigenetics of Earthseed that she, as a fellow graduate student, had only read about in the work of other more established scholars on Butler). Rovak even directed me to Canavan's book as the only definitive source on the archival materials; however, her talk turned out to be the linchpin that allowed me to proceed with my line of research. Jim Jones of the People's Temple has throughlines with Aaron's "powers" as well as with the community in Acorn, but Charles Manson has little to do with either *Blindsight* or the Parable books, at least as far as I can tell. The one commonality is how the Parable duology "foregrounds an old American fantasy: the coming war between the races" and what the opening reviews describes as the "*helter skelter*" of the setting (Phillips 306; Davis, emphasis in original).

looks to culture as the site of (r)evolutionary change, suggesting that our understanding(s) of truth itself evolve(s). Butler's interventions into the genre of SF/religious writing show how spiritual feeling must keep pace with scientific thinking if we are to survive this intermediary, transitional phase that has yet to resolve contradictions between religious and secular modes of thought. In fact, Butler "quite commonly expressed the notion that Earthseed was close to the truth," and even "talks about coming to peace with religion after some time as a 'hostile atheist' and concludes that 'very probably God is Change'" (qtd. in Canavan 205).

What Butler planned out for *Blindsight* was "the story of the rise of a sinister figure, from a shy, lonely childhood to the full height of his powers to his final fall—a compelling portrait of a person we sympathize with even as they transform into a monster" (Canavan 81). *Blindsight* oscillated between paranoid and reparative readings of Aaron and his imagined cult, although it was primarily paranoid; however, in a "1984 version...Aaron's religion is...characterized as a more or less good-faith ministry rather as a cult, hoax, or power play" and "some of the later versions" show Aaron really using "his powers to heal people, as opposed to the earlier *Blindsight* narratives, which position this sort of faith-healing as an obscene scam" (82). Although cult leader Jim Jones was also known to practice faith-healing, along with other psychic powers, Hubbard's early journals are similarly inclined, saying things like: "You can read futures for people with ease"; "You have no fears about working psychically"; or, "You are a doctor of minds, bodies and influences" ("Admissions" 19). Literary critic David Morris notes that from *Sower* to *Talents*, "Olamina's program [turns] away from ministry to the poor and toward recruitment of the influential and wealthy" (279). Conversely, SF scholar Tom Moylan "sees the move as abrogating Earthseed's genuine revolutionary potential," but Morris disagrees, saying that the "revolutionary methods [were] temporarily abandoned in favor of acquiring the capital and influence necessary

to intervene in the largely inaccessible power structures of postdemocratic neoliberalism” (279). In some ways, then, *Sower* is to Dianetics what *Talents* is to Scientology; like Hubbard’s cult of Dianetics and later Scientology, Olamina’s non-Christian cult of Acorn and later Earthseed uses its own religious texts, vocabulary, and traditions for the practice of everyday life sustained by a recent community of converts. But there is a substantial change from the Hubbard of Dianetics to the Hubbard of Scientology, which mirrors what is cited above as a schism between the Lauren of *Sower* (re: Acorn) and the Olamina of *Talents* (re: Earthseed). According to Canavan, Butler “says as much explicitly in a handwritten note [...], imagining [Olamina’s] transition from ‘sincere religious mystic to hard-nosed manipulator’” (qtd. in Canavan 204). As he explains after surveying Butler’s unpublished notes and drafts on the *Parable* novels, as well as Butler’s published versions,

In the first Parable book, the young Olamina seems...something like a moral saint—but the other narrators of *Talents* and the redacted fragments of her middle years suggest her to be just as easily as a selfish, destructive, and extremely dangerous fanatic, a zealot willing to sacrifice anything and anyone for the Destiny (Canavan 150).

In a reading that maps Dianetics onto *Sower* and Scientology onto *Talents*, not a perfect or even particularly productive lens, Peter Stillman’s critique of *Talents* is useful: “Olamina’s strategy with Earthseed is primarily legal (she sues the organization and wins, enabling her to bankroll Earthseed) and religious (she proselytizes within the confines of a reformed system that respects the Bill of Rights), not political (she does not organize to change the political system)” (137). The legal (suing, litigating, lobbying) and religious (evangelizing, recruiting, subsidizing) strategy that is criticized in *Talents*—both more generally and specifically here—as either not political enough, or even politically conservative, rather precisely describes the path the Church of Scientology has taken with their religious enterprise. Dianetics as previewed above appeared to have revolutionary potential for inner and outer space alike; the article by Hubbard came out in opposition to the Atom

bomb and suggested that real power and real freedom was to be found within ourselves if we would only choose the inward turn and find a way to heal—first ourselves, then one another, before our society, and finally, the world. Sadly, the reality of Scientology, which Burroughs calls out in his open letters, would become paranoid in the extreme with a burgeoning bureaucracy of hyper-capitalism, super-secrecy, and clandestine codes of conduct with military-style punitive measures and administrative ranks. At times almost a paramilitary operation, the group would infiltrate the IRS, harass their perceived enemies and expatriates, and eventually be raided by the FBI for a series of spy movie-like schemes before a martial law loophole launched “Sea Org” and Hubbard into international waters to continue his work outside of reach of various legal entities. The whole host of new language and acronyms created to control and police Scientology’s social structure is telling in terms of tone: “security checks,” “suppressive persons,” “covert hostiles,” “fair game,” and “tone 40” (Armstrong). No longer the dream of Dianetics, which prefigured the New Wave, Scientology seemed to fall back into the imperialist, militaristic, and hierarchical thinking of his traditional hard SF and Hubbard’s own naval history. Dianetics broke from those explicitly, and at least in some of his writing, so did Hubbard; however, the game of Scientology became, in my view, a version of the America we know all too well. As Burroughs says, “All games are essentially hostile,” which describes America’s mode of capitalism, but in a different section, he writes, “Mr. Hubbard says that Scientology is a game in which everyone wins,” and this captures the spirit of how Dianetics, Scientology, and Hubbard started out, which I believe is still in there somewhere (*RBSM:ER* 57). Although Burroughs discusses cultic practices by example in this book, using his own comic book villain, “Mr. Hart,” he also cites Hubbard multiple times within the same section. Burroughs’s skit describes Mr. Hart, suggesting a meaningful, if nuanced, distance between the techniques—“*procedures* which are also *weapons*”—used by two very different ‘cult’ figures (42):

Here is Mr. Hart, who wants to *infect everyone with his own image and turn them all into himself*, so he scrambles himself and dumps himself out in search of worthy vessels. If nobody else knows about *scrambling techniques* he might scramble himself quite a stable of replicas. But anyone can do it. So scramble out your sex words and go find suitable mates (57, emphasis mine).⁸⁰

Although the *Parable* books are often set apart from Butler's wider SF world-building, which Canavan calls "a kind of Butlerian 'mythos' (something like the supernarrative frameworks used by Asimov and Lovecraft)," there are points of connection within and across this duology and *Blindsight*, as well as Butler's more canonical work (17). The ways the *Parable* duology fits into the Butlerian mythos; however, or the question as to what extent published and unpublished cult novels represent outliers in Butler's writing is worth lingering over a bit longer. What Canavan's archival research fails to notice are the parallels found within the two published novels, as well as the longer arc of Butler's cult novels taken together. For example, "Patternists (who, though biologically human, live in hiding in mainstream society)" bear a resemblance to 'sharers' or 'hyperempaths' in *Sower*, while "the 'Missionaries' of *Survivor* (who flee to other planets after the catastrophe of the Patternists destroys human civilization on Earth)" are a bit like the Earthseed followers leaving Earth at the end of *Talents* (32). In *Mind of My Mind* (1977), "two competing groups of psychics, each led by a charismatic leader, battle for supremacy as their 'race' approaches its destiny" (31). If *Blindsight* and *Earthseed* are considered as two parts of the same cult project, then suddenly the commonalities shine through even in these relative outliers. Aaron and Lauren are the "charismatic leader[s]" of competing cults in a thought-experiment on the role of new religious movements in changing prevailing systems of thought through new structures of feeling.

⁸⁰ Philip K. Dick also has a satirical novella called "The Turning Wheel" (1954) based on Hubbard. In it, a messianic leader of a cult is trying to become "clear"; he is known as the Bard "Elron Hu," a scramble of "Elron Hu Bard" that puns on the sound/spelling of the "L." and "El"; the "Hu" and Hue" (and the "tone scale"); as well as of course using the denotative meaning of a bard or poet. The class-based society has a questionable racial hierarchy that inverts some of Hubbard's racism but perhaps not as completely as it could and certainly should do more explicitly. A strange story.

What sets Butler's cult novels apart from her archive is the relatively weak science fictional novum compared to other books; however, the charismatic leaders of each novel are vested with pseudo-psychic powers even if they are dialed back in the context of her other works. The near-future SF of Butler's New Age "cult novels," I argue, continues her abiding interest in psi powers now made more relevant and realistic in Aaron's "psychometry" and Lauren's "hyperempathy." Even though Aaron and Lauren are not placed in direct competition within the same novel (or set of novels) as in the Patternist series, there is a clear relation between these characters and what they use religion to accomplish. What seems most idiosyncratic about the psi powers of Butler's cult novels, which is made even more clear in her unpublished drafts, is the distinct possibility (or even near certainty) that these so-called 'powers' are delusional rather than actual. In this nuanced manner, Butler develops her previous thinking of connecting singular abilities with disabilities (the theme that the concentration of psychic powers comes at the cost of severe mental illness is especially prevalent in the Patternist series). Butler's cult novels and notes associate the characters' sort-of-psychic abilities with religious sensibilities and with psychotic tendencies; similarly, these cultic doctrines derive from formidable people with powerful delusions, and this avoids dismissing or denigrating the reality of what the delusions actually allow the characters to do. It recalls the real history of religious visions, group hallucinations, and prophetic experiences in a rigorous study, which is neither wholly pathologizing nor naturalizing, reserving judgement to retain a double optic on the transformative possibilities therein.⁸¹ In this way, "Butler conceives Lauren [not simply] as a symbolic negation of the psychopathology" laid out in the *Parable* books, but on a spectrum that includes both Lauren's hyperempathy and Aaron's sociopathy (Phillips 306). These differential

⁸¹ Quoting a very young David Attenborough in newsclip included in *Waiting for John* (1915) on the "cargo cult" of John Frum in the South Pacific, who said that "delusion is a very strange word to use when talking about a religion." Of course, if we were clear on this very good point, Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* (2006) would be withdrawn from publication. In *Talents*, Olamina somewhat strangely describes "all religions" as "essentially cargo cults" (293).

disorders are dialectically related, rather than diametrically opposed. After all, even though “Lauren is a ‘sharer,’ a person whose sense of self is phenomenologically bound up with the humanity of the other,” and some critics “would have us understand it as a utopian political value,” she is also described as more “cold-blooded” than non-sharers in the novel (Phillips 306; Sower 196). As in *Wildseed* (1980), “A good healer was also a terrifyingly efficient killer” (Canavan 45). Individuals afflicted with hyperempathy syndrome are susceptible to others’ pain, which makes them have to use violence in extremely effective ways as a condition of their own survival. It also means having to hide one’s condition from the vast majority of unafflicted people, which comes with a certain level of sociopathic tendencies that have to do with broadcasting or not broadcasting the ‘correct’ emotions in any given social situation or setting. Olamina often ‘reads’ others to determine whether or not they are sharers, almost profiling them for her own disorder. In her “earliest notes for the *Parable* series, before they or even Olamina had their final names [Butler writes]: ‘This is the story of Oya Martin, an involuntary killer who must kill, yet whose conscience forces her to create a life-revising religion to help her heal her disintegrating society’” (qtd. in Canavan 134).

Butler had a penchant for names and the naming of characters morph into versions of each other within and across her writings. The name of the cult leader in *Blindsight*, “Aaron,” is clearly an overt reference to “L. Ron,” or “Elron,” which in turn must be connected to the name “Lauren” from the *Parable* books. In his early journals, Hubbard also talks about having a “guardian” who manifested as a female advisor and protector, “Raon,” which is a variant of his own name, Ron (again, if you move the ‘a’ before the ‘r’ of “Raon,” you get “Aron”) (“Admissions” 10). Butler even wrote an early short story under the pen name “Karen,” which sounds like “Aaron,” but is spelled like “Lauren” (Canavan 19). The naming resonances, repetitions, and recursions articulate Butler’s larger project on cults, religion, and power, which also have thematic throughlines to her

more science fictional novels in terms of genre. In fact, I argue that the Doro/Anyanwu dynamic in *Wildseed* forms a direct parallel to the Aaron/Lauren dynamic in Butler's cult novels; these sets of texts examine something like hyperempathy (creating or healing) on a spectrum with something like sociopathy (consuming or hurting) as embodied in the male/female characters respectively, and as evidenced by their different 'powers.' In some versions, Aaron partners with a healer named Amber to help with his religious cult, which is comparable to how Olamina partners with Bankole to help with her religious cult. In *Patternmaster*, another healer named Amber partners with Teray in order to teach him to kill like a healer. Significantly, Aaron's full name is sometimes written as Aaron Taylor, which again sets him up as not only an earlier version of Lauren but also an archival pairing with her as Bankole's first name is Taylor. "Another strain of abandoned stories, the Aaor stories (1987-1989)," written amidst publications of *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989), contain an Oankali character who is blind like Aaron in *Blindsight*, but unlike Aaron he possesses no compensatory powers (unless, of course, his ooloi powers that are a feature of his alien species designation are included as an optic through which to read Butler's writing here) (94).

Aaor is an ooloi, which here (as in the canonical *Xenogenesis* books) is a nonmale, nonfemale third sex that the humans have difficulty seeing as anything but male. Severely disabled by the standards of the Oankali, Aaor is blind, having only one pair of 'totally useless' eyes instead of the Oankali's usual two (94).

The ooloi also have a form of second sight, but not necessarily insight, to which others of their own species (and the human species) are blind; the ooloi are genetic engineers who describe this work as closer to art than science. The genetic alterations that the ooloi make require 'seeing' patterns of genes and inherited traits of the people with whom they are bonded, which though recontextualized, has similarities with the "ancestor readings" which Aaron performs in *Blindsight* in order to preserve rather than alter genetic bloodlines and lineages. Specifically, Rovak said the

tenet of change in Butler's Earthseed doctrine has been read with biopower and epigenetics: i.e., Earthseed teaches that everything you touch is changed, just as you are changed by everything you touch. In Rovak's view, Aaron's psychic abilities don't decipher encrypted ancestral information by decoding strands of DNA. Rather, she suggests that Aaron actually creates a genetic cypher, which encodes a narrative onto "ancestry readings." In Rovak's presentation, she looked at archive materials to argue that Butler conceives of Aaron's psychometry as analogous to "writing," rather than "reading" (3). Rovak arrived at this reading of using Butler's early notes on biopower from her later text *Dawn* (1987), in which Ooloi's compare their genetic interventions to "painting," not "engineering" (3). "Two significant versions of [Blindsight] exist," "completed but unpublished," and, Canavan argues, drafts of the second version "link Blindsight to the PATTERNIST milieu," "especially the XENOGENESIS books" (187). While I've delineated some of these examples with details left out in Canavan's book, he does note that "both the Oankali's 'healing touch' and their polyamorous sexual triads (experienced as disturbing and undesired by some of their participants) originate in altered form in Blindsight" (187). Importantly, he says, Butler "imagined a new religion, Earthseed, that might be the down-to-Earth, human equivalent of the Oankali's constant biological reinvention, devoted to the idea of permanent change as opposed to eternal truths" (127-128). The ending of *Talents*, however, seems to reframe Olamina's Earthseed as more invested in sociobiological evolution, in which the forced biological adaptations on new planets become the primary means of achieving permanent social change rather than the "down-to-Earth" religion of Butler's earliest notes and the first novel. No one historicizes the New Wave in relation to Hubbard or Butler (let alone Hubbard to Butler); they are always seen as antagonists. Butler is positioned in relation to the African American tradition. I offer a 'defamiliarized Butler' in this chapter that I support in the next section with attention to stylistic aspects of New Wave SF compared to Butler's.

reviewing the new wave: stylized aesthetics in relation to butler's sf

'Is this Buddhist? No, I see that it isn't. I very nearly became a Buddhist when I was younger.' She's 37. 'Very simple little verses. Very direct. But some of them are lovely.' 'I want to be understood,' I said, 'I want to make it easy for people to understand' (*Parable of the Talents*, 1998: 343-343).

My reading of Butler as also from a different literary genealogy is a question of the archive: there are certain assumptions about New Wave in relation to modernism and postmodernism but what I'm actually showing is that this is there and we tend to read past it. Sociologist William Sims Bainbridge says that New Wave SF is "more concerned with literary technique, the psychology of character and the social sciences," which although unusual as far as literary criticism on Butler, is an apt description of the *Parable* books and applies more broadly to the later genre designation of speculative fiction (qtd. in Taylor 7). Also, John Taylor says, New Wave SF can produce "a strong affective response, both positive and negative, on the part of readers," which again, I argue couldn't be more true of Butler's work in general, and the *Parable* books specifically (612). I'd also point out that the dual aspect of this strong affective response can also be found in the academic criticism on Butler's SF, which has a contentious division in the scholarship regarding the Afropessimist and Afrofuturist reading(s) negotiated with the text(s). Although not often considered in relation to New Wave, Butler's novels retool and develop a repertoire of "new-wave techniques"; however, these connections to the afterlife of the New Wave have been overlooked in the literary and genre criticism (612). Perhaps most clearly, Butler goes much further to combat the "racism, speciesism, and sexism" inherent to pulp and hard SF that "the new-wavers reacted against," which has been attended to in the bulk of scholarship on her work (though not in relation to the New Wave) (613).

Taylor argues that the thick network of "cultural connections" in citations, references, and allusions with no exposition or commentary "creates the literary texture of new-wave style" (615).

This is a point of divergence in Butler's work in that her writing style does not seek to exclude or intimidate readers in the way that New Wave SF in its more modernist iterations often does. This inclusivity or approachability preserves the best of "the didactic element in traditional American SF" that "focuses on the ability of any reader...to enjoy and learn something new from the text" (615). Butler's writing, particularly in *Parable*, maintains the deeply intertextual web of literary, historical, and cultural allusions without alerting or alarming those who do not have the level of "reading knowledge" and "cultural awareness" required to unpack these references (615). Butler thus broadens and accounts for differentials in the author/audience relation while managing to retain the complexity of even the opaqueness of New Wave writers (without falling into what some have seen as "the so-called narcissism" of the New Wave) (615). An illustrative example is found in "a new-wave author such as Roger Zelazny," specifically the story "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" (1963); "Zelazny gives us an intensive lesson in new-wave stylistics right from the title and the first page." If the reader recognizes this as an allusion to Ecclesiastes of the Old Testament (and has read and remembers it), then "Zelazny, by his title alone, sets up the theme of 'Vanity, vanity, all is vanity.'"

Beyond the title, in the opening of Zelazny's story, we find an alliterative allusion to Poe and Baudelaire...when Gallinger, the main character, is busy 'translating my *Madrigals Macabre* into Martian in the morning' (636). A paragraph later Gallinger quotes a line from Thomas Gray: 'Let not ambition mock thy useful toil' (636). At the bottom of the page...in free indirect thought, he muses, 'Hamlet to Claudius' (636). On the next page he alludes to Tennyson, Saint-Exupery, and Gibbon (637). And so on. Thickly layered allusions abound: Blake, Auden, Swift, Shaw, Petronius, Isaiah, Schliemann, Homer, Wilde, Orson Welles, etc.... I have counted forty-five fairly overt cultural literacy allusions, most of them literary (qtd. in Taylor 615-616).

Obviously, the intended audience for this story is not the general public but rather the literary elite who enjoy being bombarded with quotes and citations with which they are either already familiar or can subsequently hunt down. Zelazny, to be fair, like most of the New Wave writers, has more accessible work that meets the criteria of New Wave through alternative means, like *The Dream*

Master (1965), for example. Still, “A Rose for Ecclesiastes” shows one side of the spectrum at its most obtruse. Now, let us compare the above citational practices to what I see as Butler’s post-New Wave modifications and extensions of “Zelazny’s intensive lesson in new-wave stylistics,” which can also (and only) be limned “from the title[s] and the first page[s]” of Butler’s cult novels, *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* (615).

In keeping with the New Wave style, the titles of the novels invoke biblical parables which are a literary form and even more opaque than the thematic allusion to Ecclesiastes in Zelazny. The parables themselves when read alone are perplexing, and in Butler’s duology, they must also be read together, creating an intertextual riddle that no literary critic, at least to my knowledge, has paid much (if any) attention to puzzling out. The challenge becomes even more densely intertextual if we include an unpublished third novel, *Parable of the Trickster*, which again, must be deciphered as a standalone text and as informed by the other two biblical parables. Taylor says, “As in the case of other new wavers, the resonant echo chambers of their literary labyrinths have rarely been explored to the depth that they deserve,” which, I argue, actually pertains to Butler’s SF to a far greater degree than has been cited in the critical scholarship (616). These missed opportunities are in part an effect of Butler’s genre designation and the writerly restraint shown in the subtlety of her “canonical allusiveness,” which doesn’t seek to exclude readers who have “a strong aversion to the new wave” when it displays outright elitism (618). Bankole voices Butler’s response to and revision of some of the New Wave’s stylistics, saying, “I have watched education become more of a privilege of the rich than the basic necessity it must be if civilized society is to survive” (*Talents* 15). Obviously, the opening of Zelazny’s story cited above is not speaking to the changes in cultural literacy that new media and technology have introduced nor is it sensitive to the fact that such a story can barely be taught in a college classroom which is the context that Taylor’s article discusses

it and which he also notes but not as a drawback of the text but rather of the students. This style of New Wave SF makes itself inaccessible for the average reader, which “so ostentatiously flaunted,” limits it to aesthetic alienation instead of cognitive estrangement, or what I argue is the affective echolocation of other New Wave SF’s more political poetics (615). And yet, those interested in the New Wave have been included explicitly in Butler’s titles alone, which should be approached with the academic rigor inspired by and sought after in the most abstruse of the New Wave writers. The assumption that texts that make themselves inaccessible are worthy of more attention is incorrect; Butler’s *Parable* novels achieve the New Wave’s “allusive depth, resonance, and ambiguity” with the “salient devices focused on language [and] the labyrinthine...of meaning,” but these features fly under the radar of scholars interested in the New Wave rather than over the heads of “readers not culturally literate” (616, 619). There’s a saying, “You only see what you look for, and you only look for what you have in mind,” which applies to what has been left out of readings of Butler’s work done by scholars well-versed in the New Wave’s stylistics. Repurposing Taylor’s comments on Zelazny, Butler’s “new-wave style remains opaque and silent to such readers [not to the student readers referred to here but rather to literary critics],” who do not return to the biblical parables “to decode [the] stories” or “perceive [Butler’s writing] as requiring them to do too much work [in the case of literary critics, this means tracking the work she’s already done from the vantage of the text]” (619).⁸² Taylor points out that unlike previous SF writing, the New Wave distinguishes itself “just in the matter of names, the onomastic patterns,” which again, I argue has not been attended to in Butler’s work to the degree that it warrants; Taylor continues, saying, “Zelazny has even gone

⁸² I offer a nuanced and detailed close-reading of the *Parable* books and make this point here because of the tendency in criticism on Butler’s work to immediately apply other theoretical lenses in reading the texts which is also a way of overwriting the texts, of missing what the text itself has already done, and in ways that are nontrivial, which are based in assumptions about what we think the work ‘should do,’ or worse, what we think the work ‘can do,’ what we expect to learn from it, or what we want it to be doing, and all of this, then, put in relation to race, religion, and writing, etc. In the *Parable* books in particular, not many critics come away feeling as if they have not understood what the novels have done *on their own terms within the pages of the text*. The verses, the allusions, and the dreams aren’t read closely.

so far as to violate the SF tradition that names, even for aliens, must be pronounceable. One of the most famous new-wave titles is Zelazny's 'Kjwallll'kje'k'koothai1ll'kje'k'" (616).⁸³ Onomatology is the study of etymology or the origins of proper nouns or names, which are typically capitalized to denote a person, place, thing, or event. The onomastic patterns and permutations in the naming of characters, places, cultures, events, languages, and things that moves within and across Butler's archive defies even the most etymologically-driven of scholars; it throws the mind down (this cannot be overstated and has been under studied) as it weaves the threads of sound and spelling together and takes them apart again in a myriad of non-arbitrary, meaningful ways. These relays between sound, spelling, and meaning, as well as across different languages, literatures, and cultures are so enigmatic as to be virtually imperceptible to critics that have written on her oeuvre.

As literary scholar Sandra Govan explains in regard to the onomastic patterns and meanings of the African surnames as they are invoked within the biblical framework of the *Parable* novels,

'Olamina,' Lauren's family name, was a name her grandfather chose during the turbulent Afrocentric race-consciousness in urban black communities of the 1960s. Derived from the Yoruba people of Nigeria, the name carries...symbolic importance—it literally means, 'this is my wealth,' thus subtly suggesting the inherent richness that Lauren is heir to by virtue of her culture (Chuks-orji 64). Later, [...] Lauren will meet Taylor Franklin Bankole [and] their Yoruba surnames help them to forge an instant bond. Deftly, through the subtle use of indicative naming, [Butler] signifies the specific role Bankole will play in Lauren's new life. His [sur]name...means 'help me to build this house' (40). Bankole is Lauren's Simon Peter, the 'rock' upon whom [Lauren Oya Olamina] will lean to build [her] Earthseed (239).

Olamina and Bankole are thus paired etymologically through their African surnames which are clues to the complex way that the Bible is used as a key intertext which informs the plot structure

⁸³ Zelazny's "Kjwallll'kje'k'koothai1ll'kje'k'" (1973) seems to be violating this SF tradition for the purpose of humor that derives from racist ideas of 'gibberish' defined as unintelligible or meaningless speech which is to those who do not speak the language categorized as 'nonsense.' Butler's "Bloodchild" (1993), to give a better example, is full of unpronounceable names used for the opposite effect as a type of world-building; there is an underlying linguistic and sociopolitical grammar which though opaque is not absent. The alien species designation of Tlic differs from the N'Tlic, which we get partial access to through T'Gatoi. Butler remakes this New Wave example as relevant and real.

of the novels, the significance of the Earthseed verses, the (re)reading of the biblical parables, and the metafictional message being conveyed by Butler herself. This deep reading that moves between levels of abstraction reveals Butler as a sort of messianic figure whose New Wave SF parable, even more enigmatic than in the biblical parables, yet at the same time also more accessible in its form of delivery, responds to Jesus' explanation of the parables to his disciples: "every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matthew 13:1-58, *NRSV*).⁸⁴ In the novels, Olamina ('this is my wealth') is the new scribe and Bankole ('help me build this house') is the old householder; their 'treasure' ('inherent richness') is not only 'by virtue of their shared African heritage' but also its reclamation in the American context. As in the first name, Lauren, or first and middle names, Taylor Franklin, naming is a recognition and reassertion of their American heritage too despite our checkered past, repositioning historically white surnames (Taylor and Franklin) in honor of their African American ancestry. During slavery, black populations were not allowed to carry or pass on last names; slave ship rosters listed no names whatsoever nor places of origin for the kidnapped African peoples. American history is an erasure of these stolen histories of black Americans which at the same time, as Butler's use of historically white (sur)names of 'founding fathers' shows, is also a shared history. This is the complex terrain of the American dream, which if spelled as pronounced, "*A-mare-ica*," shows the dream which was built on a nightmare. A closer reading of the onomastic patterns in the African surnames reveals sound and association lines that carry over into an English (and Spanish) reading of them: Ole/Ola form masculine/feminine sound patterns, mirroring one another in their relative position in the two names, OLamina/BankOLE. In the afterword of *Sower*, Butler says she researched "books on African religion" and "took a particular interest in the Orishas of the

⁸⁴ In *Talents*, Butler writes: "This was something new. Or something old" (18).

Yoruba people”; Lauren’s middle name, Oya, is a “deity of the Niger River”; this river goddess is “unpredictable, intelligent, and dangerous—a good namesake for Lauren Oya Olamina” (338). The meaning of these African names resonates with the English connotations: Bank(ole) carries the English meaning of a place to ‘house wealth’ (a monetary bank) and ‘hold a river’ (a riverbank), which have associations with stability and solidity that counterpose Olamina’s unpredictability and fluidity. Lauren Oya, in a still closer reading, is embedded within Taylor Franklin, if we track the permutations of sound and spelling: Taylor has “Oya” and “Lor” and Franklin has “in” to complete Lauren (or “Lor-in”). If taken a step back and another forward, Lauren’s father name is “Laurence,” which has every letter of “Lauren” in the same order (minus the last two letters), and her daughter’s name is “Larkin.” “Lauren” and “Larkin” are a sound pairing (and share the first two letters in the same order and another two out of order), and every letter of “Larkin” is also found in her father’s middle name, “Franklin” (a partial anagram that also shares the last two letters in the same order). If we change the spelling, as “Laurence” can be “Lawrence,” then Lauren (wren) and Larkin (lark) have associations with birds, which show up in the biblical parable of the sower and parable of the mustard seed, albeit to different ends (note the double “wren” and “ren” of Lawrence and Lauren, also found in the double “rie” and “rye” in Valerie Rye of “Speech Sounds,” which is aptly named):

And [Jesus] told them many things in parables, saying: ‘A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.’

Another parable he put before them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.’ (Matthew 13:1-58, *NRSV*)⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Butler researched other biblical parables in naming *Parable of the Sower*: “in some documents she seems attracted to Parable of the Mustard Seed instead, which suggests a happier resolution”; however, Lauren also alludes to it in her *Earthseed* verses when she writes, “I am Earthseed,” a revision of “I am the mustard seed,” and so Butler does invoke it as yet another biblical intertext relevant to interpreting the parables of the *Parable* books (Canavan 177; *Sower* 205).

Taylor claims Zelazny's "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" distinguishes itself as New Wave in how "the theme and plot markedly differ from pulpstyle"; hard SF (or pulpstyle) requires the "military triumph" and/or the "great capitalist/imperialist payoff" as in the genre's colonialist origins (616). New Wave SF registers as a shift toward the literary: in Zelazny's story, as Taylor discusses in awe, "a poem saves an alien culture" with nothing but "just the literal rescuing of a culture by words" (616). At this point, it's certainly worth pausing over Taylor's reading of "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," which either misses or misinterprets several critical elements that radically alter his more lofty, reparative, and progressivist claims the story is used to 'prove' regarding the New Wave. The idea that "a poem saves an alien culture," to which Taylor's reply is, "How audacious," comes across quite differently in the story; similarly, "the literal rescuing of a culture by words," which Taylor seems to cite in good faith, in Zelazny's text, is a dirty poem embedded in a bad joke of a narrative with humor that is in poor taste (616). These aspects of the story are explicitly identified as ironic, sarcastic, insincere, and irreverent within the text, which is not to mention sexist and outright racist. While some New Wave writers did respond to the racism and sexism inherent to the pulpstyle and hard SF, "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" reproduces these tropes and does not challenge them as Taylor's argument assumes. And although littered with biblical and literary allusions, the story is essentially a recasting of the colonialism of traditional SF replete with cultural mistranslations with the 'twist' or 'jest' (itself a feature of the American New Wave, which tends to replicate aspects of its generic predecessors) being that these cultural mistranslations wind up 'working out' (or 'saving' the alien culture from sterility). From being mistaken as a prophet to passing himself off as Rilke, the main character is primarily interested in bedding a Martian "woman" as he tries to convince himself she is a woman, recreating what has been criticized in SF (and other genres) as both racist and sexist (racialized women are somehow not 'real' women and racialized men are somehow not 'real' men).

As Joanna Russ, a more fitting example of the subversive style of the American New Wave which Taylor tries to champion more broadly, writes in “The Image of Women in Science Fiction” (1974):

The strangest and most fascinating oddities in science fiction occur not in the stories that try to abolish differences in gender-roles but in those which attempt to reverse the roles themselves. Unfortunately, only a handful of writers have treated this theme seriously. Into a world of...domineering women...arrive men from our present world. With a minimum of trouble, these normal men succeed in overthrowing the [primitive] matriarchy, which although strong and warlike, is also completely inefficient (Russ 56).

Zelazny’s deviation from this formulaic account is instead of a savage, oversexualized matriarchy, it is a civilized, desexualized matriarchy; the former is efficiently (or politically) conquered by the ‘more advanced’ modern men, while the latter is inefficiently (or poetically) conquered by the ‘less advanced’ modern man. In these two versions, the gender-role reversal involves emasculating men of the ‘alien’ culture so ‘modern men’ can either tame the unbridled sexuality or stir the repressed sexuality of the ‘alien’ culture’s women. In Butler’s essay, “The Monophobic Response” (1995), “reprinted from a PEN speech...about the persistence of racism in science fictional speculations,” she indicates that the “alien culture” in need of “literal rescuing...by words” is, of course, our own:

We write about aliens...because we can’t stop creating them out of each other. We want aliens to be real so...we are not ‘alone in a universe that cares no more for us than it does for stones or suns or any other fragments of itself. And yet we are unable to get along with those aliens...closest to us, those aliens who are of course ourselves’ (qtd. in Canavan 174).

The *Parable* books, I argue, are an attempt at realizing what Taylor seems to mistakenly attribute to “A Rose for Ecclesiastes,” in which “a poem saves an alien culture” with “just the literal rescuing of a culture by words” (616). Instead of what in Zelazny appears as whimsical literary extravagance that comments on traditional SF as a genre while poking fun at religion and the literary mainstream, *Parable* recontextualizes the biblical parables so that ‘old’ lessons can be ‘seen’ again, while also offering a ‘wealth’ of original verses from a ‘new’ religious cult written in the narrative form of

popular literature, including but not limited to SF, which makes Butler's philosophical discourse, theological treatise, and religious poetry thoroughly political at the level of form. The accessibility that the plotline is designed to allow is at the same time rife with experimental writing techniques; as in Jesus' parables, the seemingly simple or direct language upon closer inspection gives way to an intertextual labyrinth of interconnected meaning drawing you in as opposed to keeping you out. As Zelazny's narrator, satirizing Christian missionaries and colonial histories of proselytization, says, "Maybe Daddy's prayers got heard somewhere, and I am a missionary, after all!", and then:

Only a missionary needs something to convert people to. I have my private system of esthetics, and I suppose it oozes an ethical by-product somewhere. But if I ever had anything to preach, really, even in my poems, I wouldn't care to preach it to such lowlifes as you. If you think I'm a slob, I'm also a snob, and there's no room for you in my Heaven—it's a private place, where Swift, Shaw, and Petronius Arbiter come to dinner (7).

This quote expresses the tensions of New Wave SF and traditional SF, as well as showing its self-conscious positioning between literary modernism and postmodernism. Zelazny's story creates an "abrasive" texture with this "register mix," which, I suppose, is meant to produce the iconoclastic effect associated with the New Wave as informed by the countercultures of the period; however, it lacks the salient social, political, and literary qualities which a writer like William S. Burroughs exemplifies in his revolutionary reworking of the medium itself, his innovative use of the SF genre, and his leftist oppositional stance. As Burroughs says of his part in the American New Wave of SF, "Cut-ups are experimental in the sense of being *something to do*" and "Poetry is for everyone" (qtd. in Jones 346). Zelazny misses New Age counterculture's sincere investments in alternative spiritualities a fact that escapes neither Butler nor Burroughs. In the context of Butler's cult novels, Zelazny's privatized aesthetics cannot enter into the public discourse, whether ethical or otherwise. As Harlan Ellison, who developed many of the New Wave's literary devices as author and editor, says: "the story is a speculative fabulation which aims at emotional effect" (qtd. in Taylor 623).

But in Zelazny's story, this affective 'device' is at its least powerful, limited to a sardonic, mocking humor, while in Butler's novels, I argue, the New Wave approach is fully developed to encompass SF's cognitive estrangement while extending the New Wave's aesthetic and affective attachments.

Another characteristic of the New Wave, "common in Ellison's stories," is the metafictional challenge to "the reader right from...the opening sentence: 'There are always those who ask, what is it all about?'" (Ellison qtd. in Taylor 620). "This is literary self-reflexivity," Taylor notes, "in a very obvious mode"; "Pulpstyle does not...refer to the medium itself, [but] new wavers foreground such self-reflexivity" (617). Significantly, although Olamina has a "close-persona" relationship to Butler, the tendency in some readers and critics is to collapse this distinction entirely as if Butler could be reduced to Olamina (which is patently absurd). For example, the critiques of Olamina's decision for Earthseed to leave Earth at the end of *Talents* often reduce to reading Butler's novel(s) as either authentically utopian or falling short of that political metric (as if Olamina's choices were reflective of what Butler believed Earthseed should do, that is, if it wasn't literally a novel requiring close-reading in its interpretation). And Butler's role in what I argue are her New Wave SF parables has been read as if Olamina's verses are not up for interpretation too (or even in conversation with the rest of the narrative). Disparate texts make up the novels and are juxtaposed but the connections between them have to be drawn out by the reader using the clues dropped into the layers of text(s). Instead of reading and (re)reading the novels as interrogative texts, Butler herself has strangely been assumed within scholarship to be critic of the Bible (which is basically incorrect), author of Earthseed (which is unambiguously true), and writer of setting (which is politically obvious). This conflation involves seeing Olamina *as a reading of Butler* instead of Butler *as writing Olamina*; in other words, Olamina is an author-surrogate, but she is not the author-God of Butler's textual universe. With other New Wavers, such as Ballard, Burroughs, or Dick, the metafictional reading

that includes the writer as the author-God while preserving the protagonist as author-surrogate in a self-reflexive mode of postmodernist writing never drops out of the criticism. As Taylor says of New Wave, “We can never forget that every story is at one level about the act of writing a story” (617). This is precisely what seems to have been forgotten in readings of Butler’s *Parable* books, which putting them in the context of the New Wave brings out. Butler hints at metafiction when Lauren says to Jo: “And like I said, use your imagination. Any kind of survival information from encyclopedias, biographies, anything that helps you learn [is worth reading]. *Even some fiction might be useful*” (Sower 59, emphasis mine). Or, when Lauren says, “I think we should all study books like these,” which implies a more serious engagement than reading (58). Butler gives further directives for reading her novels as Lauren continues, saying, “By the way, do you take notes when you read? Take notes... You’ll remember better if you do... Hang on to your notes” (59). When her brother is living outside the walled community, Lauren wonders: “Who were his friends? A gang? [...] A bunch of *astronauts*, flying high on drugs?” (104, emphasis in original).⁸⁶ Clearly, this is a nod to the New Wave and psychonaut movement, which in Lauren, comes off as more of a dig; and yet, “despite the strong utopian valence of Lauren’s plans to colonize space, then, which would be familiar to any fan of science fiction,” the books are “filled with paradoxical indications that the vision may be fundamentally flawed” (Canavan 135). In the first few pages, this “ambiguity” at the heart of Earthseed and the destiny crops up “when we are told that ‘one of the astronauts on the latest Mars mission has been killed’—outer space is framed first as a site of death, not new life” (135). This hints at a New Wave logic hidden in a more recognizable SF narrative, and which, like the biblical parables, is more concerned with finding new life in the provinces of *inner space*.

⁸⁶ As Burroughs has told us, “Alex Trocchi coined the phrase ‘*astronauts* of inner space,’” which in him and others is a serious undertaking not reducible to Lauren’s dismissal of it. One might read it as a false assumption about the nature of reality as such, which is the basis of what I will argue is her misinterpretation of the Earthseed Destiny (*Naked Scientology* 88, emphasis mine).

the dream logic of world events: i dreamt i was a megalomaniac

Maps are dreams: both describe desire, where you want to go, but never the reality of the destination. (Acker, 1993: 37)

The novels each open with dream sequences, fulfilling other requirements and conventions of New Wave SF, which are a prefiguration of the destiny of Earthseed that Olamina cannot see.⁸⁷ Like the Bible's parables that frame the duology, the doubling of the dream sequences indicates their importance in interpreting one another and in decoding the other parts of the *Parable* books; each of the dreams is divided into two parts. In *Sower*, Lauren writes, "I had my recurring dream last night"; however, in *Talents*, Olamina writes, "I've just had one of my recurring nightmares" (3; 9). The former has been the night before "[her] fifteenth and [her] father's fifty-fifth" birthday, which they share; the latter the night before "Arrival Day," which is the "fifth anniversary" of Acorn (3;9). The numerical connection isn't clear until the end of the second part of the second dream, in which "the house [turns] to ashes and rubble...in an instant" and "[she] is alone—as [she] was alone that night five years ago" when her home was invaded and burned (15). In the first part of the first dream, Lauren is "learning to fly...on her own, little by little, dream lesson by dream lesson"; importantly, she lands on some of her characteristics that will shape the arc of the novels, saying, "I trust my ability more now, but I'm still afraid. I can't quite control my direction yet" (4). This fear and loss of control will eventually take on a quality of their opposite, as in the Freud's theory of reaction-formation (*reaktionsbildung*), and Olamina's re-assertion of a control

⁸⁷ In Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), dreams are described as "picture puzzles"; Olamina also defines parables as "stories...that made pictures in people's minds" (Walker 109; *Talents* 14). Dreams and parables dramatize the 'work of art,' by which I mean the work of interpretation, particularly of 'texts' that are generically resistant to decoding. Also see Freud's "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" (1907). Suvin picks up on this thread and ties it to SF when he says that we have "the right and duty to critically daydream." The New Wave writing process, as Ballard argues, is like "the process by which dreams are constructed" and its writers the "iconographers of inner space" which is relevant to understanding why the dream sequences in the novels are significant in the dissertation's argument about altered states (which dreams represent), about reading Butler's cult novels as part of the legacy of the New Wave (which the scenes evidence), and about attending to parables (as a form of writing like the puzzles of dreams or koans).

that she cannot but lack is what directs Earthseed's destiny off a course which can't be charted.⁸⁸ This is what Ernst Bloch talks about as "the work of being 'on the way' (*unterwegs*)" rather than that of reaching a final destination (qtd. in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* 272). The first part of the first dream ends as Lauren, who had been "drift[ing] toward a doorway," realizes she is "going to miss the door," but "cannot stop or turn"; then, she begins to "drift away from the door, away from the cool glow into another light," which appears as a "wall" that is "burning" (4). In the first part of the second dream, Olamina finds that she is back in "[her] old home," which is "back from the ashes...although [she] saw it burn years ago"; she knows this, "yet all of a sudden, in [her] dream, things have come right again. [She is] at home, and [her] father is preaching" (10-11). The first part of the second dream ends as Olamina recognizes, "a part of [her] is gone" as she cannot "feel [her] brothers' pain," and again, she is "afraid"; at this point, "the dream begins to become a nightmare" (12). The second part of the first dream in *Sower* is "ordinary and real, the part that did happen years ago" when she was "little, though at the time it didn't seem to matter" (4). While it seems unrelated to the first part of the dream, Lauren's language uses some of the same words and phrases; it is poetical, dream-driven language, and Lauren observes "stars casting their cool, pale, glinting light," in an echo of the "cool, pale light [that] glows from [the doorway]" before she is consumed by "fire" in the earlier section (5; 4).⁸⁹ Lauren's early dreams inform Olamina's later insistence on literally reaching the stars, or seeing Earthseed do so in her stead, in her lifetime; to her, this is the doorway to the unknown, and the alternative, in terms of the dream, is death by fire.

⁸⁸ In classical psychoanalysis, reaction-formation is a defense mechanism or unconscious process through which an emotion is mastered by conversion into its opposite because it is perceived to be unacceptable in its original form. It is associated with obsessional neuroses and behaviors, often in an exaggerated response to fear or anxiety.

⁸⁹ The cool, pale light of distant stars is set against hot, burning fire that consumes her home in the nightmare-dream. The estranged imagery recalls Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*; "The moon's an arrant thief, / And her pale fire she snatched from the sun" (Act IV, Scene 3). The sun is a star out in the day that blocks out all others until night. In the second part of the first dream, "there's no moon"; in the second part of the second dream, there's a "quarter moon" (*Sower* 5; *Talents* 15). Each have stars, but the "light streak" of *Sower* is "a streak of light" in *Talents*; first, "flashing westward across the sky," but then, "rising into the sky like some life force escaping" (ibid.).

The destiny of Earthseed is thus warned against and virtually guaranteed by the affect attached to associations that appear within this first dream. Recalling a memory of when she was “seven years old,” Lauren’s dream-writing takes on new literary qualities that “at the time” when “it didn’t matter,” would not have been possible or perceptible (5). In the second part of the first dream, her stepmother “speaks in Spanish, her own first language,” talking about how when she was little they could not “see so many stars,” Lauren “speak[s] in Spanish too, as she’s taught [her],” and reflects that this is “an intimacy somehow; she asks, “Why couldn’t you see the stars?” to which her stepmother replies, “City lights” (5).⁹⁰ While her stepmother pines for this because of the “growth [and] progress” that city lights to her represent, “she pauses,” before saying, “When I was your age, my mother told me that the stars—the few stars we could see—were windows into heaven” (5). Continuing, she says, “I believed her for almost a year”; to Lauren, this story, told as more of an aside and then dismissed, will take on a new meaning and give back a belief, if not in heaven, at least in hope, which in spite of everything will endure for the rest of her life (5). Still, stars are not described as “doors” into heaven, but as “windows” (through which God looks in rather than us looking out). The dream ends with the stepmother saying, “Kids today have no idea what a blaze of light cities used to be—and not that long ago,” to which Lauren replies, “I’d rather have the stars”; unaware of the meaning Lauren will imbue into her words, her stepmother says, “The stars are free” (6). The conversation dramatizes the rapid structural changes wrought by the technology of the 20th Century and the fact that it could be gone in what—in the lifetime of the species—is the blink of an eye; however, the final line also moves across two meanings to mark how time seeps into and changes the very language that we use to talk about mundane things, yet which we also use to define our most ardently-held beliefs. “The stars are free” is said to denote

⁹⁰ Butler’s mother was also named Octavia, so she was often called by her middle name, Estelle, which is the Spanish word for ‘star.’ Her “earliest stories...typically [concern] a young girl” who is also named “Silver Star” (Canavan 17).

that unlike the “city lights,” the stars cost no money to maintain, but this phrase resonates with Lauren as meaning that she might find freedom among the stars because they are themselves free. So, while the cost of the stars is nothing, to her especially, they are also priceless. This cuts to the quick of American history as trapped in an ideological contradiction, which imagines freedom only within the confines of capitalism’s allowance. This word “free” is at once the recognized American dream that hinges on a capitalist nightmare; the double-meaning of the word equates money with freedom not through some etymological coincidence, but as a concrete effect of a sociopolitical structure that has been imposed from above, and which is ideologically inscribed in the language.⁹¹

In *Talents*, the “recurring dream” of *Sower* is a “recurring nightmare,” yet both are divided as half-dream and half-nightmare; in *Sower*, the first part is the nightmare and the second part is the dream, whereas, in *Talents*, the first part is the dream and the second, the nightmare. There is also a sense in which the ‘dream’ aspect is contained *within* the nightmare section and the dream section is just *a memory* in the form of a dream. The second part of the second dream which Olamina relays has within it excerpts from the biblical parable of the talents, which are the only words that she is able to understand. *This should flag that the words actually have not been understood on a deeper level.*

Like the second part of the first dream, it revolves around a mother-figure, Olamina’s biological mother now displaces her stepmother; while the stepmother provides comfort and converses with Lauren, the biological mother Olamina only knew from “a picture” does not speak or even look at her. In this case, the dream of meeting her mother, who “is a stranger,” is realized as a nightmare where Olamina “can’t quite reach her, can’t touch her” (12; 13). In the first part of the first dream, the ‘dream’ aspect involves Lauren learning to fly toward starlight, which turns into the nightmare

⁹¹ The artist Lil B says it better than I ever could in his song, “Real Shit from a Real Nigga” (2010): “Would you blast on sight / And take another man’s life fightin’ for his rights? / To be the next man free workin’ all his life? / I pray to God, / I couldn’t go to sleep at night / Dead broke, man, I had to hit the streets some nights” (*Free Music: Volume 4*).

of being drawn to firelight; she becomes “trapped in a burning house...ultimately succumbing to the flames” (Canavan 135). The second part of the first dream notes the “looming presence” of “the neighborhood wall,” “more threatening than protective,” but Lauren’s “stepmother is there, and she isn’t afraid” (*Sower* 5). This language comes back in the second part of the second dream, when Olamina sees “threatening” shadows and “no way to escape,” because “the wall is still there, surrounding [the] neighborhood, looming over [her]” (*Talents* 15). “It was supposed to keep danger out,” Olamina says, “It failed years ago. Now it fails again. Danger is walled in with me” (15-16). The repetition of the dream-driven language flips between the inner space of the dreamworld and outer space of the storyline. The illusion of protection is transposed onto an illusion of entrapment in which the realism of the former slides into the surrealism of the latter; Lauren is within the walls of her own mind in the dream space instead of inside the walls of her own home in the story space. In terms of the symbolic inversions, the ‘dream’ of *Sower* involves “drifting” before she masters flying and, in the second realistic section, letting herself “fall backward,” which “for a moment,” feels “like floating”; the ‘nightmare’ in *Talents* involves falling when she “can’t catch [herself]” and so “fall[s] and fall[s] and fall[s]” (5; 15). Flying and falling become the metaphorical arc which will shape the inner and outer discourse(s) of the narrative movement across inner and outer space. “Floating,” as an intermediary, as well as “drifting,” both in the first dream sequence of *Sower*, have an undirected, or perhaps lateral, quality that the other two lack, which somehow seems more hopeful as an affective and sensory space that allows for a different type of symbolic movement.⁹² Floating and drifting are also terms with strong associations for New Wave and psychonaut culture.

⁹² Speaking to the relationship he theorizes between surrealist painting and New Wave writing, a notion that connects back to the project of psychoanalysis and its ideas of creative writing as daydreaming and dreams as “picture-puzzles,” which articulates the affective-aesthetic core of the New Wave’s non-cognitive estrangement, Ballard asks: “How far do the landscapes of one’s childhood, as much as its emotional experiences, provide an inescapable background to all one’s imaginative writing?” (“Time, Memory, and Inner Space” 199). For Lauren Olamina, Butler suggests, the answer is almost entirely. The fledgling destiny is misread as a final destination, a point that I’ll return to at the chapter’s end.

from cyberpunk of the eighties to psychopunk of the nineties

Finally they reached, according to certain maps that were so unreadable as to be useless, the domain for which they had been searching. (Acker, 1993: 208)

The *Parable* duology is set over a dystopic vista that spans the American landscape, both geographically and psychologically. The series reads like a futuristic *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) in its economically forced migration across the country and update of *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961) in its literary treatment and analysis of American ideology. It is important to note that for Butler's writing, the United States is always already a site of horror and of haunting, of fear and of fantasy. In the *Parable* books, the least science fictional of her literary oeuvre, I argue that "the landscape [itself] is an excess of presence that leads to an experience of estrangement" (Lidner 104). Shifting from the 1980s cyberpunk cityscape of "the postindustrial city," counterintuitively a "broken space of garbage and crime" and "a delirious playground," Butler's revision of a 1990s 'psychopunk' landscape takes place on wide-open spaces and in hidden foothills of rural parts of the country (4-5). Consequently, the "urban imaginary" of 1980s cyberpunk SF is displaced into Butler's SF narrative of diasporic dispossession on the highways and byways, metamorphosing into a migratory mural and 'rural imaginary' of the 1990s (8).⁹³ In contrast to the city's "skylines" and "sidewalks," a dominant visual motif of cyberpunk imagery, the social spaces in these stories are surrounded by the country's 'roads' and 'refuse' (8). So, the setting's spatial stretch reorients from a vertical to a horizontal plane which also symbolizes a change of temporal expanse. This flattening of the frame also widens it and signifies that these 1980s and 1990s texts are located differently—not only spatially, but historically—in an era which has literally moved past the

⁹³ At the end of *Parable of the Sower* when they arrive at their final destination, Bankole's "three hundred acres" are described as "empty and wild...covered with dry brush, trees, and tree stumps, all far removed from any city, and a long, hilly walk from the little towns that line the highway" (*Sower* 245, 281).

current stage of “globalization’s post-Fordist, neoliberal” capitalism (13).⁹⁴ Scenes from the novel form a series of transient freeze frames, wherein the action of the story halts the road’s endless mobility and arrests it visually in an eerie tableau of terrain defamiliarized. In the story’s action, “sympathetic identification with the feelings of characters” is at least as palpable as what’s been termed “‘objectified emotion,’ or unfelt but perceived feeling, that presents itself most forcefully in the aesthetic concept of tone” (Ngai 28). In this sense, aesthetic tone is defined as “a cultural object’s affective bearing, orientation, or ‘set toward’ the world,” in which the literary aspect of the text is steeped stylistically without being stated overtly (28). Significantly, the SF of 1980s cyberpunk and what I’ve called Butler’s 1990s ‘psychopunk’ each represent extensions of and interventions into reality as “the dreamlike product of a collective hallucination” (Lidner 5). As Mike Davis explains in *Ecology of Fear* (1998), included as an excerpt in the opening pages of reviews of *Parable of the Sower* (1993), which begins its narrative in the suburban setting of a neighborhood of Los Angeles, California in 2024:

Like William Gibson, author of *Neuromancer*, and other ‘cyberpunk’ writers, [Butler] uses disciplined extrapolation to explore the dark possibilities of the near future...[she] simply takes existing helter-skelter and turns up the volume a few notches...Since the 1992 riots, premonitions of Butler’s low-rise dystopia, with urban decay metastasizing in the heart of suburbia, have become commonplace.

In “Cognitive Mapping” (1990), Jameson uses Kevin Lynch’s *Image of the City* (1960), which argues “urban alienation is directly proportional to the mental unmapability of local cityscapes” and that a “mental map of city space...can be extrapolated to that mental map of the social and global totality we all carry around in our heads” (353). “Cognitive mapping” refers to the work of mapping the “gap between the local positioning of the individual subject and the totality of class

⁹⁴ According to Moylan, *Sower* and *Talents* use “the critical dystopian strategy” of the 90s; “critical dystopias share [the 80s cyberpunk] deeply negative portrayal of the brave new world of late-twentieth-century capitalism” (*Sky* 198).

structures” in which the subject is situated; this ‘territory’ spanning inner and outer spaces is made navigable in and “by means of conscious and unconscious representations” (353).⁹⁵ The Parable books pick up on the literal and nonliteral ‘mapping’ of these territories in an expansive sense that builds a new “mental map” of the American continent and taps into shared structures of the collective consciousness.

In *Sower*, Lauren thinks of the natural disasters of disease, weather, famine, and drought and other sociopolitical catastrophes plaguing the nation. These lines of thought that she follows are already a part of the American cultural imaginary, in which global apocalypse and/or social degeneration are a staple of entertainment and news broadcasts alike.⁹⁶ She speculates, if “a lot of the continent was depopulated,” then “a lot of vacant land [would be] available for the taking,” fueling her continued interest in “books on survival” and “trying to learn to live off the land” (57, 58). After discussing how the world won’t end even if the civilized institutions we have come to rely on do, Lauren lends her friend Jo a book on “the California Indians,” and tells her to “pay special attention to the plants that grow between here and the coast and between here and Oregon along the coast” that she’s “already marked” (60). Lauren writes, “To begin Earthseed, I’ll have to go outside,” “when I’m 18, I’ll go. That means now I have to begin to plan how I’ll handle it” (123). The next entry begins with the assertion, “I’m going to go north”; she continues, saying,

My grandparents once traveled a lot by car. They left us old road maps of just about every county in the state plus several of other parts of the country. The newest of them is 40 years old, but that doesn’t matter. The roads will still be there. They’ll just be in worse shape than they were back when my grandparents drove a gas-fueled car over them. I’ve put maps of the California counties north of us and the few I could find of Washington and Oregon counties into my pack (124).

⁹⁵ “Cognitive Mapping” (1990) relates to Jameson’s earlier work, “The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act” (1981), as a way to reveal the political unconscious as expressed and responded to in literary texts.

⁹⁶ Butler, a self-described “news junkie,” cited the “daily news” as a source for the near-future SF setting; the biblical rejoinder to this feature of the mass media might be, ‘Have you heard the good news?’ (Butler qtd. in Canavan 132).

This style of worldbuilding retrospectively describes the norms of our own culture as distant or defamiliarized from the perspective of characters in the future SF setting. The readers are called on to make the inferences necessary to understand the set of large-scale changes that have, in the context of the novel, already occurred. This excerpt shows the speed at which the lay of the land can and did change with the advent of the American automobile in the 20th Century. Dirt country roads made for horses and wagons of the previous three centuries became suddenly obsolete and quickly forgotten in the cultural imaginary. In 1926, Route 66 was built with the road sign going up the next year, which started in Chicago, IL and ended in Los Angeles County, CA. As the first highway in what would become the United States Interstate Highway System, the east-west route took on an iconic status in American culture and would be mythologized in rock music and road movies.⁹⁷ The Parable books begin a hundred years after Route 66 was constructed and start in in the place this original highway ended, which shows the ways that the country has outpaced itself and imagines what happens after American car culture. Although the road maps she has inherited are forty years old, Lauren knows that “the roads will still be there” (124). When Lauren begins her journey up Highway 101—or ‘the 101,’ as it is colloquially known—another one of the 1926 original roads in the US Numbered Highway System and a major north-south route that stretches from Olympia, WA to L.A., CA, she describes the altered state of this well-known scenic highway:

Black and white, Asian and Latin, whole families are on the move with babies on backs or perched atop loads in carts, wagons or bicycle baskets, sometimes along with on old or handicapped person. Other old, ill, or handicapped people hobbled along as best they could with the help of sticks or fitter companions. Many were armed with sheathed knives, rifles, and, of course, visible, holstered handguns (*Sower* 158).

⁹⁷ The 1960s and 1970s saw a number of freeway revolts in American cities. Raymond A. Mohl provides an in-depth analysis of this in *Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities* (2004). Road movements are also discussed in George McKay’s *DiY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain* (1998).

Again, Lauren starts from where the road ended, reversing the directionality, and travelling south-north on foot, with a throng of other displaced peoples using antiquated means of transportation. The socioeconomic climate has transformed conditions of existence so there is no class mobility and practically no mobility at all; however, the infrastructure of the highway system outlasts the political system which constructed it. Later in her trip, Lauren writes, “Earthseed is being born right here on Highway 101—on that portion of 101 that was once El Camino Real, the royal highway of California’s Spanish past. Now it’s a highway, a river of the poor. A river flooding north” (*Sower* 220). In William Gibson’s short story, “Burning Chrome” (1982)—a cyberpunk classic—the phrase “the street finds its own uses for things” describes how people reappropriate and misuse technology in ways that are unexpected for their own purposes. The *Parable* books, tentatively termed ‘psychopunk,’ pick up on this idea but use it in a modified form; now it is the people who find their own uses for the street—because they have to and because it’s still there.⁹⁸ The other implication of Lauren’s use of old maps, made explicit in other parts of the novels, is that there is no other way to get the information; the information superhighway has not been as resilient as the motorways so there is no internet, or at least no access to it, with computers and television dropping out of most people’s daily life. This setting in which everyday technologies are virtually absent radically alters the very basis of cyberpunk, which is, of course, the narrative space afforded by these technologies, or cyberspace.⁹⁹

So, I’ve used ‘psychopunk’ for thinking about Butler’s *Parable* duology because of their continuity, in my reading, with New Wave SF and the ‘psychonaut’ movement of the 1960s and

⁹⁸ Another story in the anthology, “The Gernsback Continuum” (1981), is more aligned with New Wave SF; in it, the architecture that we move through and inhabit unthinkingly is thematized as the skeletal remains of a past dream of the future. In other words, we live in the ghosts of the past’s projected future.

⁹⁹ William Gibson coined the term “cyberspace” in “Burning Chrome” (1982) and is, along with Bruce Sterling, a co-founder of the cyberpunk subgenre of SF (25).

1970s, and because of their rupture from these earlier formations. ‘Psycho’ is from ‘psychonaut’ and ‘psychotic’; ‘punk’ names a relation to and break from the intermediary formation of 1980s ‘cyberpunk’ SF. ‘Psychopunk’ as a generic neologism designates Butler’s unique positioning, in her cult novels specifically, within the historical, literary, and cultural ‘scene’ of American SF.¹⁰⁰ Of course, taking ‘psycho’ from ‘psychonaut’ clearly has negative connotations, but as Lauren says of her own “hyperempathy,” “I’m crazy”; ‘punk’ also might be read as negative however in ‘cyberpunk’ it refers more generally to various countercultural practices of youthful populations (16). Hyperempathy makes Lauren keen on survival and self-protection but also averse to pain in not only in herself but in others, which I view as representing a different kind of ‘psychopunk’ as opposed to the “crazies” addicted to an illegal amphetamine, “pyro—short for pyromaniac,” that causes them to ‘get off’ on setting fires and watching things burn (16). Lauren’s “hyperempathy syndrome” is an effect of her mother’s abuse of the pharmaceutical stimulant, called “Paracetco,” which she used while pregnant with her; I suggest that this delusional disorder is not incidental to but an integral part of Lauren’s religious project, although the two are not explicitly articulated in the novel this way, as both drugs “scree[w] with people’s neurochemistry” (108, 141). Psychonaut movements of the 1960s and 1970s sought to delve into inner space and certainly used drugs as a primary means by which to do so. Hyperempathy is an epiphenomenon of her mother’s addiction to “the smart drug,” but Lauren was nevertheless exposed to and affected by the neurological and physiological changes of this particular drug (*Talents* 18). Interestingly, while the pharmaceutical prescription was designed for cognitive enhancement, its secondary effect on children exposed to it in the womb is emotional augmentation that can be debilitating; however, it nonetheless causes Lauren to turn inward toward her new religion and in her own writing, which I argue can be seen

¹⁰⁰ Cyberpunk SF was a “new alliance” which involved “an integration of technology and the Eighties counterculture” (qtd. in Wolmark “Cyberpunk” 109).

as the reparative dimension of the ‘psychonaut’ turned ‘psychopunk.’ ‘Cyberpunk’ derives from ‘cyberspace,’ just as ‘psychonaut’ riffs on ‘astronaut,’ which etymologically relate to navigating, mapping, and inhabiting different types of literal and nonliteral, technological and psychological, real and imaginary ‘space.’ Technology is not only the means of traversing physical spaces, as in the Age of Sail and the Space Age, but nonphysical spaces as in cybercultures and drug cultures. While SF has traditionally been concerned with the former modes of technological exploration, New Wave SF of the 1960s and 1970s, and to some extent the cyberpunk SF of 1980s, began to concern themselves more with exploratory technologies that opened new psychic and cybernetic space. Cyberpunk SF, as already noted, also takes place against the background of the cityscape, and Butler’s ‘psychopunk’ parables take the previous high-rise dystopia and move it onto a new landscape in what Davis refers to as a “low-rise dystopia.” In each of these examples, a dystopic breakdown of the social order and its cultural infrastructure metamorphoses the spatial layout of the setting which appears to the reader as they follow the characters through a new environment. The characters typically have to engage in a sort of literal groundwork to map and move through the terrain. The “parallel universe,” which is “created and sustained by the world’s computer and communication lines,” creates “a common mental geography” that the narrative space(s) of these subgenres taps into and ruptures from (Benedikt 29). This technique of defamiliarization forces the reader to track the changes to the territory of the real-world using the story-world as a map.

In the *Parable* books, the middle-class live inside gated communities surrounded by walls that keep the lower-class “crazies,” described as “thieves, rapists, and cannibals,” from getting in (Sower 259). This nomadic, homeless lower-class is growing, while the middle-class is shrinking from what in the novels is described as ceaseless, senseless attacks from below and laissez-faire, societal abandonment from above. While “private armies of security guards” are hired to protect

the “estates, enclaves, and businesses” of the upper-class, the police officers and public officials barely respond to calls and are themselves a source of danger for regular people (104; 35). Like Compton or Culver City, “gunfire is so common people no longer attend to it” and these external risks from the populace and police are dealt with using what David Morris describes as a “West Coast, Black Panther-style self-defense” (*Sower* 35; Morris 281). This involves a merging of the rural white and urban black traditions of armed defense now placed in the mixed-race suburban setting; as Lauren states, “there are at least two guns in every household” and mandatory firearm training even for kids of a certain age (*Sower* 35). In his reading of Butler’s novels, Morris draws on a detailed study of Los Angeles, CA from Davis’s *City of Quartz* (1990), which outlines:

a genealogy of social, political, and material circumstances that exacerbate a gap between rich and poor and remove the means to redress that gap: the concentration of political power in the hands of the wealthy; urban sprawl only opposed by parochial, often racist, rhetorics; the conversion of the city into a ‘fortress’ of privatized spaces; and the aggression of police forces that criminalized poverty (280).¹⁰¹

As it says in *Sower*, “there are too many poor people,” described as “living skeletons” who roam the streets, and now even the “state parks filled with huge redwood trees” are overrun by “hoards of squatters” (46, 79, 245). In *Social Death* (2012), Lisa Marie Cacho theorizes the ways entire groups and classes of persons become the object of state “regulation and containment” as “they

¹⁰¹ Another possible throughline that Butler’s cult novels create between rural white and urban black cultures of armed defense might be found in the AFT and FBI raids on Ruby Ridge in 1992 and Waco in 1993, both of which were national media events and would become alt-right symbols of government overreach. Both Ruby Ridge and Waco had to do with illegal firearms and resulted in aggressive federal actions that caused unnecessary deaths. Randy Weaver had gotten involved in a sting operation in Idaho and had ties to the KKK, while David Koresh was the leader of the Branch Davidians, fringe Christian cult, on a compound in Texas. Although these two events still loom large in the American cultural imaginary, especially in far-right extremist groups and in conspiracy culture, a similar incident in which the West Philadelphia police department bombed, killed, and imprisoned members of MOVE, a predominantly black Christian cult, in 1985 has been almost entirely forgotten. Vincent Leaphart (renamed John Africa), the leader of MOVE, founded this lesser-known cult which was met with state-sanctioned violence and harassment for their militancy and anti-establishment views. Davis’s term, “urban sprawl,” presumably takes the word “sprawl” from Gibson’s cyberpunk novel, *Neuromancer* (1984).

are deemed deserving of discipline and punishment but not worthy of protection” (5).¹⁰² *Habeas Viscus* (2014) by Alexander Weheliye similarly describes “sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans” (3). The most extreme example of this category of the nonhuman, used by Giorgio Agamben and other theorists and redeployed by Weheliye, is “the Muselmänner,” or “a class or caste of Nazi concentration camp detainees... so ravaged by chronic malnutrition and psychological exhaustion that they resembled....living corpses” (53).¹⁰³ What of the human is in the “animallike” and “unintelligible” Muselmänner—who has been stripped of the usual markers of human subjects—is a question also posed within the Parable books (53). In addition, Weheliye argues “modern terror and encampment” as found in Auschwitz are embedded in a deeper “historical texture” than other theorists acknowledge, which includes “the concentration camp, the colonial outpost, and [the] slave plantation” (36, 37). In Sower, “pyros” are also called “paints,” because they “shave off all their hair—even their eyebrows—and they paint their skin” (108).¹⁰⁴ The new street drug is what makes “the paints like fire so much” (even to the point of accidental self-immolation), but they also just “like to watch fires” whether it’s “a camp fire or a trash fire or a house fire”; however, as Lauren’s brother tells her, “sometimes they grab a rich guy and set him on fire” even though he’s heard that “some of them used to be rich kids” (108). This new social group or gang, for what it’s worth, “hate[s] rich people,” but this sentiment seems to be inspired not by politics but psychosis (108). The “fire

¹⁰² Cacho draws the term “social death” from Orlando Patterson’s *Slavery and Social Death* (1982).

¹⁰³ As Weheliye says, in the German language, “Muselmann” literally means Muslim and is “derogatory”; noting how “most scholars who write about the Muselmann do not pause to reflect on the name of this figure, thereby leaving intact the bonding of an abject process/status to a racio-religious label” (53).

¹⁰⁴ The “shaved heads” recall skinhead subculture, which began in 1960s London in working-class youth, and which manifested in music and fashion with an aggressive, anti-authoritarian attitude; in the 1980s, the far-right and far-left political affiliations split the subculture; in the 1990s, neo-Nazi skinhead groups spread across the U.S. and are still on the Southern Poverty Law Center’s watchlist. The “painted skin” recalls “glam rock” of the 1980s when makeup became part of the look. Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) describes the origins of skinheads in relation to a whole host of other subcultures, such as reggae, ska, dub, punk, mod, and glam, to name a few.

drug,” alternatively called “Blaze, fuego, flash, sunfire,” makes “watching the leaping, changing patterns of fire a better, more intense, longer-lasting high than sex” (141, 142). Unlike Paracetco, originally “a legitimate drug” for treating “Alzheimer’s disease,” pyro is a “homebrew—a basement drug” (142). While Paracetco was designed to stop “the deterioration of...intellectual function in Alzheimer’s patients” and to facilitate the “excellent use of whatever memory and thinking ability they had left”; the drug—also called “Einstein powder”—began to be used by regular people to increase cognition, output, and productivity (*Talents* 18; *Sower* 16).

It also boosted the performance of ordinary, healthy young people. They read faster, retained more, made more rapid, accurate connections, calculations, and conclusions. As a result, Paracetco became as popular as coffee among students (*Talents* 18).

The street drug “pyro” and the pharmaceutical drug “Paracetco” have clear throughlines to the real world of the 1990s with stimulants like methamphetamine (meth, crystal, glass, shards) and Adderall (bennies, addies, uppers, dexies) standing in respectively.¹⁰⁵ Butler’s neologisms for new amphetamines again suggest—like the recent rise of the interstate and the internet which the SF setting functionally reverses—that, as a society, we are going way too fast.¹⁰⁶ Inverting a Marxist critique of religion as “the opiate of the masses,” Butler demonstrates how new technologies act as a stimulant of the social, accelerating its speed but moving in the wrong direction.¹⁰⁷ Butler’s leitmotifs of movement, speed, and directionality as the affective drivers of modern civilization, which are symptomatic of the shift from the premodern religious to modern scientific paradigm,

¹⁰⁵ Adderall et. al are similarly popular with students (and also known as ‘the smart drug’), and originally designed for treating ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). “Paracetco” is likely also a reference to the Pareto principle, which, as Stephen Jay Gould explains in the final chapter of his last book, *Wonderful Life* (1989), is a category error.

¹⁰⁶ Butler’s “1970s journals reflect a growing pessimism both global and intensely personal; she suggests in...[a] 1972 entry that the project of civilization may be akin to the trajectory of an uncontrolled, novice downhill skier, almost certain to end in a ‘dramatic lethal crash’” (qtd. in Canavan 35). Futurist folklore in this way is of course anti-Marinetti.

¹⁰⁷ See also: accelerationism.

create a productive tension with the new religion of Earthseed because of its similar investments in technology of space travel and colonization as the sole means to achieve an evolutionary leap forward in the life of the human species.¹⁰⁸ For example, an Earthseed excerpt reads, “Alter the speed / Or the direction of Change.” (*Talents* 22.) In closing, it is worth pausing over the political and aesthetic tone struck by the Parable books. Lauren Oya Olamina’s apocalyptic ideations are not only caused by the real threats of the external environmental and social milieu; they are also subtended (by the admittedly dark thought) that the fall of civilization as we know it might just be what it takes “to make some of the people realize that things *could* change” (57, emphasis in original). In Butler’s parabolic (re)visions, the palpable excitement at the prospect of ecological Armageddon (as in right-wing survivalism) and/or metropolitan degeneration (as in cyberpunk SF and film) undergoes a subtle readjustment which affectively shifts registers toward something more like precarious hope that we could actually *get out of this place*.¹⁰⁹

positive obsession and religious traction

Good Boy’s not real! Admit it! [...] Define real, [...] No, never mind. Don’t. Whether Good Boy or Aunt Lona or any of them are ‘real’ doesn’t matter in the end. Just act like they are and everything will work out fine. (Shawl, 2008: 168).

In a 1957 interview, Jacques Lacan says, “to be an obsessional means to find oneself caught in a mechanism, in a trap increasingly demanding and endless”; still, as Octavia Butler convincingly contends, “Without positive obsession, there is nothing at all” (Lacan 4; *Sower* 1). The epigraph of *Parable of the Sower* (1993) uses the term “positive obsession” in the opening

¹⁰⁸ Olamina refers to both outdated technology and the human species as “dinosaurs,” which complicates the artificial division between biology and society in Lauren’s evolutionary discourse on the human (*Sower* 220; *Talents* 163, 228).

¹⁰⁹ *We’ve Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (1992) has a chapter called “Ideology and Affective Epidemics” in which Lawrence Grossberg discusses these themes in more depth.

Earthseed verse, which is Olamina's writing, and yet also drawn from the title of Butler's essay, "Positive Obsession" (1989). This creates an immediate throughline between Butler's nonfiction and Olamina's Earthseed with the repeated use of the term "positive obsession," which appears two times at the beginning of *Parable of the Sower* (1993), and as David Morris notes, another three times in *Parable of the Talents* (1998) (*Sower* 1; *Talents* 47, 157, 312).¹¹⁰ Or, as written in Olamina's Earthseed verse, "Belief / Initiates and guides action— / Or it does nothing (*Talents* 348). Butler says, "Positive obsession is about not being able to stop just because you're afraid and full of doubts...It's about not being able to stop at all" ("Positive Obsession" 133). Using an archery class that she once took by way of example, Butler makes a picture in the reader's minds, which is how Olamina will later describe parables—as almost like picture-puzzles.¹¹¹

I learned to aim high. Aim above the target...I saw positive obsession as a way of aiming yourself, your life, at your chosen target. Decide what you want. Aim high. Go for it. I wanted to sell a story. Before I knew how to type, I wanted to sell a story (129).

Butler says she often asked herself, "As much as I loved science fiction and fantasy, what was I doing? Well, whatever it was, I couldn't stop" (133). This very precisely aligns with Olamina's feelings and behaviors surrounding Earthseed. She doesn't just want to write her religion down; she wants to propagate it; she wants to teach it to others who believe in it the same way she does. "By definition, a novel is fiction," Olamina says, "I believe it. I wouldn't teach people that things were true if I didn't believe them" (*Talents* 127). This foregrounds a difference between Olamina and Butler, as obviously Butler writes SF, but there is also generic slippage. The Earthseed verses (which are literary truths literally in the novels, yet also literally offset or outside them) compare

¹¹⁰ Morris also points out, "one of the more frequently recurring Earthseed aphorisms" is "Kindness eases change" (*Sower* 167; *Talents* 47, 311).

¹¹¹ As artist Kodak Black says in a track, "Ayy look, I say 'I don't rap, I illustrate. I don't paint pictures, I picture-paint.' This my motherfuckin' album" ("Day for Day," *Painting Pictures*: 2017).

and contrast with the biblical parables (which are literarily inset genres within the Bible, yet also literally said to be the truth). The seemingly overt literalness (and plain-speaking) in concert with the explicitly opaque literariness (and coded-language) is a crossover between Olamina's verses and Jesus' parables; however, the inclusion of both of these genres—Olamina's poetry also only exists in the context of Jesus' parables—complicates and challenges our readings. The meaning of the biblical parables has been thought to be basically on the surface; like the meaning of the Earthseed verses has thought to be purposefully on the surface. Neither reading is on the surface, yet both are included in the SF duology: fiction and nonfiction, literature and religion, poetry and parables. Perhaps Butler, in these New Wave SF parables, finally fulfills the prophetic vision of science fiction as “a new mythology for the space age” affixed “with the folk tale's hot line to the unconscious” (Burroughs qtd. in Stull 225; “Back to the Heady Future” 194).

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno advance critical theory's paranoid view of popular culture and mass literacy, which assumes that it only “moves strictly along the well-worn grooves of association” (109).¹¹² Cultural studies, founded by Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall in the 1960s and 1970s, offers a more reparative (re)reading of the latent potentials of the people and the popular, which grew out of the oppositional social, political, and literary culture(s) of the period. Again, to return to the essay, “Positive Obsession” (1989), Butler asks us to consider the following question:

What good is science fiction's thinking about the present, the future, and the past? What good is its tendency to warn or to consider alternative ways of thinking and doing? What good is its examination of the possible effects of science and technology, or social organization and political direction? (134-135).

¹¹² In *Our Friends from Frolix 8* (1970), Philip K. Dick's author-surrogate says: “I'm a tire regroover. I regroove tires” (62). This actual—and outlawed—occupation reads as a New Wave reference to Dick deepening the grooves (sulci) of the mind to regain traction or ‘get a grip’ before we collectively crash. As J.G. Ballard says, “fiction is a branch of neurology” (Inner Landscape Interview). Or, as styled by Alan Watts, “grooving” is also a way of “digging into the present” (“Art of Meditation”).

As a tentative answer to this rhetorical question, Butler writes, “at its best, science fiction...gets reader and writer off the beaten track, off the narrow, narrow footpath of what ‘everyone’ is saying, doing, thinking” (135). Unlike, Micki McGee’s critique of self-help literature as a genre, which “corrals the reader back toward a predictable and limited set of concerns,” Butler’s vision of SF involves the “authoring or inventing [of] a new sort of self” and not one that “ensures that no one steps too far outside [the lines]” (162). Such an endeavor means retreading well-trodden grounds to rework what social theorist Gabriel Tarde characterized as “the grooves of borrowed thought,” as opposed to the norming project which only “direct[s] the reader [back] to familiar frameworks” (qtd. in McGee 162, 160). In an interview with Hall, this idea is reiterated when he observes, “if you want to move religion, to re-articulate it in another way, you are going to come across all the grooves that have articulated it already” (“On postmodernism and articulation” 143). Butler’s Parable books attempt to move religion and one way they go about this is by tying the New Wave interest in Eastern philosophy to the New Age concern with cultic practices, both of which relate to new religious movements of the twentieth century. When her brother denies the epistemological and ontological status of her scriptures, even accusing Lauren Olamina of plagiarism, he says: “You made Earthseed up. Or if you didn’t make it up, you read it or heard about it somewhere”; Olamina responds, “All the truths of Earthseed existed somewhere before I found them and put them together. They were in the patterns of history, in science, philosophy, religion, or literature. I didn’t make any of them up” (*Talents* 127).

Lauren Oya Olamina’s religious work, “Earthseed: The Book of the Living,” resounds the title of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1927), the most celebrated book on Tibetan Buddhism in the Western hemisphere.¹¹³ Butler makes this allusion explicit when Lauren first picks “a title for

¹¹³ Another important intertext for “EARTHSEED: THE BOOKS OF THE LIVING” from the African American tradition is Sojourner Truth’s autobiography: *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; A Bondswoman of Olden Time*,

[her] book of Earthseed verses—Earthseed: The Book of the Living” and notes, “There are the Tibetan and the Egyptian Books of the Dead. Dad has copies of them” (*Sower* 125). In citing this text, Butler cuts a new track in the popular by repositioning Earthseed in complex relation to what Sedgwick calls “popularized Buddhist teachings,” which are more often than not written off under “stigmatizing rubrics of ‘self-help’ [or] anything ‘New Age’ or ‘therapy-like’” (“Pedagogy of Buddhism” 156). And yet, there is a longer history here, because as she elucidates, “early 19th Century American literature, such as Emerson’s ‘Self-Reliance’ or Whitman’s ‘Song of Myself,’ [were] already consciously involved in direct and indirect interchange with Buddhist and Hindu teaching[s]” (157). “Zen Buddhism or Theravada meditation” provide readers with “an illusion of transparency and universal accessibility,” but Tibetan Buddhism is riddled “with opacities of language, custom, [and] history” (157).¹¹⁴ Conversely, Lauren says, “I’m trying to be clear. I’m not interested in being fancy, or even original” (*Sower* 125). One year before *Parable of the Sower* (1993), Sogyal Rinpoche’s “best-selling popularization” of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* was published under the new title, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (1992) (157). While a possible coincidence, the use of gerunds and the shift toward a focus on this life instead of on the next, recalls Butler’s language and locates a 1990s revival of ‘New Age’ trends. Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert’s adaptation, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1964) as well as Burroughs’s *The Wild Boys: A Book of the Dead* (1971) are well worth noting as other examples of these interpenetrating cross-linked countercultures.¹¹⁵

emancipated by the New York Legislature in the early part of the present century; with a history of her LABORS AND CORRESPONDENCE drawn from her “BOOK OF LIFE;” also “A MEMORIAL CHAPTER,” giving the particulars of “HER LAST SICKNESS AND DEATH” (1884). “BOOK OF LIFE” “THE BOOK OF THE LIVING.”

¹¹⁴ Some New Wave SF shares elements of overt intricacy, mystification, and disorientation with Tibetan Buddhism; this style of New Wave writing deviates from SF as a popular formation, while aligning itself with a New Age uptake of Eastern philosophy and occult teachings.

¹¹⁵ Literary critic Eoin Cannon says that few scholars study popular print cultures; if they do, they “struggle against seemingly intractable biases, both temperamental and disciplinary, against vernacular spiritual and psychological discourses” (*The Saloon and the Mission* 2013; 5).

Not unlike *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*, this 1964 version applies to Life-Before-Death but is dedicated to the use of drugs (as opposed to cults) for achieving a basic change in consciousness. So, Butler theorizes cults in the 1990s where Leary sees drugs in the 1960s as subcultural communities with their own practices that have a sort of popular pedagogy to them.¹¹⁶ According to Leary et al., “manuals or guide-books are necessary” as “orientation device[s],” anchoring the effects of disorientation devices, and providing “road maps for new interior territories” (3). In discussing the influence “1960s counterculture” had on the 1980s “conscious dying movement,” Sedgwick says “being and learning to unbecome a self” is a process of enduring recurrent experiences of “amnesia [and] metamorphosis” in “ever-shifting relationality” (“Pedagogy of Buddhism” 179). This idea of ego dissolution—whether in life or in death—hooks onto an *Earthseed* teaching, which says what is hard to accept though known on some deeper level to be true. In Sedgwick’s idiom, there is a real way that listening for what “sounds true” is what is essential to all learning (165).¹¹⁷

God is Change—
 Seed to tree,
 tree to forest;
 Rain to river,
 river to sea;
 Grubs to bees,
 bees to swarm.
 From one, many;
 from many, one;
 Forever uniting, growing, dissolving—
 forever Changing.
 The universe,
 is God’s self-portrait. (*Sower* 315)

¹¹⁶ In *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (1992), Henry Jenkins says, “fandom functions as an alternative social community” whose “works appropriate raw material from the commercial culture but use them as the basis for the creation of a contemporary folk culture” (280; 279). Grossberg also notes that “opposition may be constituted by living, even momentarily, within alternative practices, structures and spaces, even though they may take no notice of their relationship to existing systems of power” (qtd. in Jenkins 283).

¹¹⁷ In Sedgwick’s essay, she speaks to “how it *feels* to assent to or learn from teachings” a popular “American Brand” of “Buddhist audiotapes” called “Sounds True”: after all, “if Sounds True tapes *sound true* to me, it can’t be simply because they sound like deconstruction; *after all*, what made deconstruction sound true?” (166, emphasis mine).

Like Olamina's Earthseed pedagogy, Sedgwick argues, "simply being with this teaching" matters more than "believing or disbelieving it" ("Pedagogy" 179). When introducing Harry, a skeptic, to Earthseed, Olamina says, "I showed him four verses in all—gentle, brief verses that might take hold of him without him realizing it and live in his memory without his intending that they should. Bits of the Bible had done that to me, staying with me even after I stopped believing" (*Sower* 199). Another earlier section shows Lauren trying to understand and interpret the meaning(s) of her own poetic verses, and attempting to ascertain what their truth-value derives from and how she *knows*:

Here's the only *puzzle* in it all, the only *paradox*, or bit of illogic or circular reasoning or whatever it should be called: Why is the universe? / To shape God. / Why is God? / To shape the universe...It *feels* like the truest thing I've ever written. It's *as mysterious and as obvious* as any other explanation of God or the universe that I've ever read, except that to me the others feel inadequate, at best" (78, emphasis mine).¹¹⁸

The form of Lauren's religious writing is an essential part of how it 'rings true' to her, which this journal entry reflects upon as she tries to untangle the idea expressed in the prose surrounding the verse in question. In the afterword of *Sower*, Butler notes that she "was a bit disconcerted" when "reminded that in Buddhism, change was also very important, although in a different way" (336). She explains the aim of Earthseed was neither to avoid suffering nor attachment to things which inevitably "pass away," but rather to recognize that since "change is the basic clay of our lives," "we must...shape change when we can and yield to it when we must" (336). It is incumbent on each of us to "learn and teach, adapt and grow" (336). Instead of doing away with the self, which can't really be done except for in brief intervals, especially if we aim to keep a political ethos at

¹¹⁸ Sedgwick remarks upon this very phenomenon, saying, "The Heideggerian paradox/impasse/scandal of being able to learn only versions of what you already know...is familiar across the disciplines of Western scholarship. Here the hermeneutic tautology is always available as a fulcrum of delegitimization, yet never fully integrated in the practice of any disciplinary protocol" ("Pedagogy" 166). As Hubbard says in his short introduction to Dianetics in *Astounding*, "What is energy doing? It's surviving—changing form, but surviving. What is life doing? It's surviving" ("Dianetics: The Evolution of a Science" 50).

work, Earthseed teaches, “The Self must create / Its own reasons for being. / To shape God, / Shape Self. (258)¹¹⁹ This means overcoming the “double bind” of “self-change and self-control” so one can realize, as Alan Watts observes, “the relationship is...more real than the two terms” (“Zen and Control” 74). Sedgwick’s “opening to” and “softening around” offers an embodied approach for acclimating to unfamiliar knowledge and experiences of change, which means withstanding and sustaining disorientation long enough to reorient, and for Butler, possibly change directions (“Pedagogy” 174). Such disorientation and reattachment in New Wave SF could perhaps form an affective counterpart to Suvin’s theory of SF as cognitive estrangement. When “grounded in [a mode] of almost child-like rhetorical simplicity,” Sedgwick says, one can “move freely [through experiences of] disorientation,” and thus survive “severe cultural and ontological dislocations” (174). In *Sower*’s afterword, Butler addresses the reasons for writing “Olamina’s beliefs in verse,”

My physical model for my character’s religious book was the *Tao de Ching*. It’s a slender book of a few *seemingly simple* verses. I didn’t want to copy any of the Taoist verses, but I immediately liked the form (336, emphasis mine).

Fittingly, Taoism is a religion that often teaches with parables and employs a pared down style of writing, which speaks to both the Biblical parables and Earthseed verses juxtaposed in the books. More often than not, Taoist koans are dismissed as a “bit of illogic or circular reasoning” or just a paradoxical puzzle in Western interpretations; however, as Watts says in a speech, “this is a yoga, this is a means of realization,” which is meant to break logical binds and affective blocks to gain a new sort of inner freedom and spiritual meaning (Watts lecture, “The Nature of Consciousness”).

¹¹⁹ As Stuart Hall says, “what we call ‘the self’ is constituted out of and by difference, and remains contradictory,” and “cultural forms are, similarly, in that way, never whole, never fully closed or ‘sutured’” (“Postmodernism” 146). Earthseed strikes and sutures the self to the social, and at least in the beginning, the Self is not only a means to fulfilling the Destiny. It is an end in itself. In Blaise Pascal’s words, “The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of...We know the truth not only by the reason, but by the heart” (*Pensées* 139).

The Earthseed religion in Butler's self-styled "cult novels" is not an outright dismissal or simple critique of Christianity, as some scholars have argued, but rather in conversation with the Bible, both internally with Olamina's commentary and externally with Butler's metacommentary. Like Stuart Hall's analysis of the religious (r)evolution represented by "Rastafarians in Jamaica," my reading of Earthseed is decidedly postmodern; there are twin repetitions and reversals, which represent invocations of and deviations from Christianity, and that cut all the way across the new religious philosophy and its traditions ("postmodernism" 142). Hall delineates this process in his example of Rasta religion, a well-known new religious movement that has not been fully theorized by those outside it, and which has a relationship to Christianity that is cross-cut, rather than clear-cut. Hall's term is "a cultural transformation," or a process in which the remixing of materials of a previous form (or set of forms) produces an entirely original, yet still visibly derivative, artifact:

In the case of the Rastafarians in Jamaica: Rasta was a funny language, borrowed from a text—the Bible—that did not belong to them; they had to turn the text upside-down, to get a meaning which fit their experience. But in turning the text upside-down they remade themselves; they positioned themselves differently as new political subjects; they reconstructed themselves as blacks in the new world: they *became* what they are. And, positioning themselves in that way, they learned to speak a new language (143).

A cultural transformation "is not something totally new" which has "a straight, unbroken line of continuity from the past," but a "transformation through [the] reorganization of the elements of a cultural practice" and how "those elements are organized together in a new discursive formation" (143). Earthseed has a historical relation to New Religious Movements, and I argue, is especially interesting when compared to Rastafari, which likewise uses both African and Christian religious and cultural heritage remade in its own image, in the formation of a new belief system and social group on the American continent. This wave of alternative spiritualities and religions, designated as New Age, relates to the New Wave's inward turn in its reappropriation of traditional SF tropes

and conventions for its own purposes. I suggest that these two projects—literary and religious—strangely fulfill the Modernist imperative to “Make It New” by unifying these disparate fields of knowledge which are usually separated out; at the same, they are paradigmatically postmodernist in their odd, eclectic, iconoclastic, and even bizarre citational and creative practices of meaning-making. Linda Hutcheon’s theory of postmodernism is useful for understanding how these new cultural formations “operate paradoxically...to ‘install and then subvert’”; she claims, “the most prominent feature of postmodern cultural productions” is located precisely in this “propensity to ‘use and abuse’ critical and aesthetic concepts and strategies” (qtd. in Woods 183).¹²⁰ *Sower* and *Talents* can thus be understood as fictionalizing the historical moment “when an old paradigm is breaking up and a new one is being born”—which marks a key transitional point in *cultural* evolution—when the dominant ideology of a particular society has begun to register as “historically incorrect and politically inadequate” (“postmodernism” 139, 140). The Earthseed religion acts an integrative anecdote to certain elements of postmodernist culture by weaving its “many separate and diverse strands, which modernism tried to hold together in one framework,” back into a cohesive tapestry of thought (139). So, I will repeat, *Parable* can be seen as harkening back to and extending the legacy of New Wave SF, engaging both the Modernist and postmodernist literary impulse that sought first to hold things together and then to break things apart. Earthseed’s creation as a New Age cult and its radical acceptance of change are reflective of the “genuine ‘openness’ of postmodernism before...new cultural trends and forces,” while its holistic approach and unified philosophy reject “postmodern culture [as] a set of dissociated specialisms” (138, 139).

¹²⁰ Angela Wood’s article, “Postmodern Schizophrenia” (2011), looks at the sublime and schizophrenia in psychiatric and philosophical discourse. I argue that Modernism’s “epiphany” and postmodernism’s “apophany” are in dialectical relation rather than opposition, which in turn is an effect of the set of large-scale changes that cut across periodization and are linked to differential affect. The sublime, subliminal, and sublimation are key terms for understanding the New Wave and the counterculture’s significance in redefining the field of relations that distribute meaning and value.

future primitive

Without brute force, which is never but a momentary solution, people cannot... be asked to live cooperatively...without some appeal to religious belief or transcendent values, something absolutely incompatible with any conceivable socialist society (Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping”: 355).

As Jameson argues, “the most urgent task that confronts Marxism today” is how to craft a new “vision of the future that grips the masses,” which is at the same time the question of “how to imagine utopia” (“Cognitive Mapping” 355). In the postmodern period, this is always already “Utopianism after the end of utopia” (*Cultural Logic* 154). Butler’s novels respond to this not only in *Earthseed* and its verses, which are interleaved, but in its near-future setting and use of “genre-blurring,” which incorporates distinct genres such as the “diary and journal, slave narratives, realist fiction, right-wing survivalist stories, [as well as] New Age vision quests to spin a story of new social formations that is rooted in the traditions of popular American sf” (*Scraps of the Untainted Sky* 198).¹²¹ Raffaella Baccolini describes the *Parable* books as amplifying earlier dystopian SF’s propensity toward “genre-blurring,” in that they appropriate “specific conventions from other genres” (“Gender and Genre” 18). Butler’s use of a nested bivalent narrative structure containing an original new religion (written in poetic, Taoist-styled verses) within a futuristic storyline that unfolds across a series of nonlinear archival texts and materials (with missing portions of plot and unexplained jumps in time) has not been given the attention it deserves. This form of writing has throughlines with the dossier-style, which presents a casefile with information, records, and other documentation on a specific person, subject, or event. The dossier subgenre is of course related to

¹²¹ As Jerry Phillips reflects: “If one compares *Parable of the Sower* [1993] to *The Turner Diaries* [1978], an overtly fascistic novel, one sees in the latter the same apocalyptic imagining of the American future...*The Turner Diaries* portrays white supremacist solidarity as the ultimate (utopian) value. *The Turner Diaries* frames hope in the triumphalist terms of a ruthless race war, in which strong white warriors regain their lost birthright in North America by murdering all the ‘inferior’ races, especially blacks and Jews” (“Utopia and Catastrophe” 307).

other subgenres, old and new, which involve manuscript discoveries of investigative journalists, historical archivists, and/or unsuspecting witnesses, and which similarly contain other varieties of found text along with some commentary and a frame narrative, like in the epistolary, secret history, mystery, detective, or gothic genres. In what can be read as a metafictional moment that comments on the genre of the novels from within the novel, Lauren's father describes some of emergent social circumstances, saying, "[it] sounds half antebellum revival and half science fiction" (*Sower* 124).

Describing the resurgence of an estranged version of the Ku Klux Klan in the "Christian American Soldiers," Olamina writes, "This was something new. Or something old" (*Talents* 18). This quote aptly applies to one reading of Butler's science fiction, which defamiliarizes settler-colonialism so it can be seen again (for the first time) as something real, relevant, and related to the reader.¹²² *Talents* depicts the return of conditions that were standard practice in the American institution of slavery (and its afterlife in black codes, domestic terrorism, red-lining, segregation, and lynching, to name a few), but with a new inclusivity in which the violence of past exclusions is visible and visceral to audiences for whom the nation's history has not been fully remembered or registered as one of horror and haunting, hatred and hierarchy.¹²³ As Suvin's argues, this is one of the functions of "dealienating human history" which is specific to SF, especially if conceived, as he does, as a socially progressive literary genre (84). As Canavan argues of Butler's SF writing,

Her novels—like those of Samuel R. Delany, Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, and James Tiptree Jr. (Alice Sheldon), other titans of the field with whom she is commonly paired—are all corrections of that fundamental error, the recovery of the 'nightmare of history' whose memory has been erased from the everyday life of the privileged (3).

¹²² Suvin argues that the SF genre is always "historical," but "not reducible to allegory"; or, as Ballard says, "the future is a better key to the present than the past," suggesting SF's strange relation to time, as dramatized in New Wave SF, and also that SF is a transitional stage of literary/cultural evolution vested with transformative, "alchemical" potential.

¹²³ For example, a postcolonial reading of "Bloodchild" the history of racialization has been rearranged by introducing an alien species that symbolically reassigns all of humanity to the lower half of whatever new social order's hierarchy.

Olamina notes an ongoing “slave trade,” and how “the poor still get arrested and indentured for indebtedness, vagrancy, loitering, and other ‘crimes’”; it is obviously no coincidence that the examples listed coincide with the real history of slavery’s continuation through various legal guises introduced after the Civil War (17). The novel difference is that everyone is at risk from these new slavers and terrorists (who are also the police and government), a fact which makes our own history affectively real to non-black, American readers while remediating the peculiar and persistent “historical amnesia” Jameson associates with postmodernity (*Conversations on Cultural Marxism* 15). This new faction of organized attackers “wore belted black tunics—black dresses” with “white crosses on their chests,” an (in)version of the well-known imagery of the KKK’s white belted robes and hoods with a cross on the chest popularized in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), a film which had a white-only screening in the 28th President Woodrow Wilson’s White House (1913-1921). This is a moment of the national consciousness taking on a new form as an effect of new media formats like movies. In the fifth edition of the *Kloran* (1916)—a KKK rulebook— the title page depicts a Klansman in this garb on a horse, each in this regalia, with a white cross (inside a red circle) on the chest—this image is an exact reproduction of the illustration on D.W. Griffith’s film poster released the year prior (*Talents* 17-19).¹²⁴ In its many iterations, this hate group has had many uniforms; one on display in the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History from the 1940s shows a black-belted robe with a cape and a white cross (again inside a red circle) embroidered on the chest. The references to these outfits, “black dresses, she called them,” also recalls Masonic aprons and Scottish kilts, which represent secret brotherhoods and historical clans

¹²⁴ Lil B responds to *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)—and positions rap music more generally as a response to the history of slavery in its redefinition of black masculinity and reassertion of black power— in his song, “Birth of Rap” (2009): “Mirror, mirror on the wall, shit, I’m askin’ who the man is / Lil B for ‘Lil Boss,’ I’m prayin’ to my canvas / I deserve the crown because I’m speakin’ for the masses / And I’m into weed, I’m gettin’ chiefly like Kansas / And you ain’t in the game ‘til you make a thousand songs / And you dyin’ for this rap, ‘cause it’s the only thing you love / Birth of Rap.”

that have been associated with the KKK, directly and indirectly (17). Olamina, though she is well-educated by the standards of the novel with a father who was a history professor, asks herself: “Did the Ku Klux Klan wear crosses—as well as burn them?” (19). She then relates some of the iconography to the “Nazis,” as well as to the “Crusades,” and thus articulates a longer historical legacy of state-sanctioned terrorism and genocide with the aim of ethnic and religious cleansing (19). Later, the “Christian America” group will use the term “crusaders” to self-describe their mission to “make America great again,” which is itself an Americanized version of the well-known Nazi slogan (262).¹²⁵ The history being rerun and played back on the projection screen of mass consciousness is constructing what it seems to reflect, that is, these practices are not interesting in terms of me rehashing the history again but because they are—the outfits, uniforms, insignia, secret histories and brotherhoods with initiation rites, symbolic rituals undertaken by a group of people who are telling stories about history to themselves and one another, stories about a shared identity, a common past that naturally leads to a desired future in which the present must then be located, stories about who they are within that story and what that means they go out and do in the world to return to tell about—are in fact also altered states in the very bad acid trip fever-dream version. The psychology of groups, noted in Freud’s *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), is powerful in that it is able to be expressed in ways that from the outside seem contradictory, but which operate on a set of fairly simple principles of social psychology and habitual thinking:

just as primitive man survives potentially in every individual, so the primal horde may arise once more out of any random collection; in so far as men are habitually under the sway of group formation we recognize in it the survival of the primal horde. We must conclude that the psychology of groups is the oldest human psychology (70).

¹²⁵ Later the inauguration of President Jarret is described as a parade of “patriotism, law, order, sacred honor, flags everywhere, Bibles everywhere, people waving one of each”; this rebirth of “Christian America” reads like a scene right out of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) (and a milder version of some of the far-right rallies even now) (*Talents* 135).

While this certainly speaks to the setting of the Parable books—and would seem to perhaps fit in the discussion of “addicts...running wild” with “bands of the street poor” following in their wake “grabbing whatever they can from the stores and from the walled enclaves of the rich and what’s left of the middle class”—I would point out that it just as powerfully applies to the organized and populist groups discussed above (*Sower* 246). Freud’s notion of “primitive man” and “the primal horde” assumes that civilization is somehow set apart from what he describes here as “the sway of group formation,” at least in the negative sense. However, Butler’s novels note that “bridges,” while “still intact,” are “guarded by the police or by gangs,” and “both groups are there to rob desperate, fleeing people”; “scavengers, predators, cops, and private armies of security guards” are “bent on destroying what’s left” of the country (246). While one might be tempted to read these as evidence of Freud’s theory brought on by the apocalyptic conditions of the novel, this ignores the historicity of so-called civilization and of these groups in particular. When Lauren says, “the National Guard has been activated to restore order,” we should recall what that meant in the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, in which the most ‘civilized’ (in this case, as in others, code for ‘wealthy’), were the ones marked for elimination by the ‘order restoring’ group (246). The National Guard, a force for white ‘civilization,’ was called to disallow black ‘civilization’ from existing. Of course, wealth is not indicative of civil ways of being, as Western civilization has demonstrated. Freud’s thinking on this precedes the rise of Nazi Germany, yet this idea of ‘primitivism’ or ‘tribalism’ or ‘savagery’ is a thoroughly racist concept. It is a part of what Stephen J. Gould critiques, in a broader evolutionary context, as “the iconography of progress” (*Wonderful Life* 37). There is “no document of civilization...not at the same time a document of barbarism” as Benjamin advises (“Philosophy” 258). This brings the work of the dissertation back into view and broadens its scope in thinking on altered states. As in Anderson, modern experiences of time *are already* also altered states of mind.

In *Demand the Impossible* (1986), Moylan argues, “the emphasis in [the critical utopia] on historical change via human activism” is a “return to history itself and to the recognition of the importance of the utopian impulse in the ongoing social revolution” (50). What Butler’s novels also show is that “human activism” can also be (and has been historically) a driver of regressive, fascistic, and racist movements which require what Burroughs calls “the militant left” (*Naked Scientology* 80). Olamina describes the resurgence authoritarian vigilantism with surprise, saying, “this thing of raging into a community and killing and burning all that you don’t steal seem[ed] to have gone out of fashion,” which in the world of the novels means she hadn’t “heard of anything like this...for at least three years” (*Talents* 17). This “thing” that is referred to is a historical citation of the very real legacy of white domestic terrorism perpetrated against black Americans, which, as it says in *Talents*, includes “thing[s]” like: “mobs...burn[ing] people at the stake,” “beatings,” “tarring and feathering, and the destruction” of property (19). A relatively recent example of this sort of ‘thing’—briefly mentioned earlier—is found in the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. White mobs burned and looted “35 blocks” of Tulsa, Oklahoma, an area also known as Black Wallstreet, precisely because it was “the most prosperous African American community in the United States” (Fain 3). In Sociologist Chris Messer’s “The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: Toward an Integrative Theory of Collective Violence” (2011), he explains that even though “800 African Americans were injured and 300 died” (not to mention their businesses which were burned and bombed), “the police disregarded due process, arresting blacks and interning them in detention camps; meanwhile, no whites were arrested during the riot” (Messer qtd. in Fain 5). In the aftermath, “both politicians and the media falsely framed the Tulsa riot as an uprising started by lawless blacks” who were “predisposed to crime and in need of social control”; a newspaper in Tulsa even suggested “that the Ku Klux Klan could ‘restore order in the community’” (ibid.). The 1921 atrocity is not only an

intertext that should inform our reading of the *Parable* books of the 1990s, it is also part of a deeply entrenched racism which forms the basis of an “American grammar” used by the media and politicians on both sides to this day, the same year Lauren Olamina’s story begins in the then ‘near-future’ of 2024.¹²⁶ This American ‘newspeak’ traffics in ideas of ‘black criminality’ using the same ‘spin’ that the reporting of the Tulsa Race Riot used; this effectively erases the real history of white criminality (in the police and the populace) as evidenced in white race riots and lynching, white lootings and burnings, and white mobs and gangs.¹²⁷ Political and public reporting rehashes a narrative of black criminality to justify and deflect from the police killings and mass incarceration of African Americans.¹²⁸ The most recent wave, from the LA Riots in the 1990s to the Black Lives Matter Movement in the 21st Century, shows the continuance of these brutal practices and failure of white Americans to recognize themselves in their own history (from the Boston Tea Party to the Tulsa Race Riot to present-day protest movements). The framing of black Americans (and protest movements in general) as somehow indicative of ‘criminality’ and symptomatic of the need for ‘law and order’ (instead of as a direct response to ‘law and order’) hails from this history of white nationalism, terrorism, supremacy, and power. As Benjamin cautions, “every image of the past that is not recognized by the present *as one of its own concerns* threatens to disappear irretrievably” (“Theses” 257, emphasis mine). In what we might read as a metacommentary on the novel’s form, Olamina says, “these days when more than half the people in the country can’t read at all, history is just one more vast unknown” (*Talents* 19). In a similar vein, Weheliye cites the work of W.E.B.

¹²⁶ In “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” (1987), Hortense Spillers theorizes the language and underlying grammar used to categorize, criminalize, and characterize African Americans in American culture.

¹²⁷ In George Orwell’s *1984* (1948), “Newspeak” is ideological indoctrination from the state’s control of language. As Patricia Joplin reminds us, the word dictator “derives from a fundamental perception of the relationship between an abuse of language and the will to dominate by force, to dictate rather than to communicate meaning” (90).

¹²⁸ In *Talents*, Olamina’s “imprisonment provides a critical picture of the contemporary prison-industrial complex (especially when set against the memory of nineteenth century-slavery and twentieth-century concentration camps and maximum security prisons)” (*Scraps* 241). Weheliye’s last chapter of *Habeas Viscus* looks at rap music of M.I.A.

Du Bois, who points out that the ‘category of the Negro,’ which in practice means being positioned as an object of knowledge, is constructed through “instruments” of:

exclusion from higher learning, extremely limited labor choices in the urban North, and even more constrained choices in the South, social segregation, Jim Crow, lynching, and sharecropping, as well as histories of enslavement and the systematic use of sexual violence (qtd. in Weheliye 20).¹²⁹

Jameson argues that postmodernity is marked by a lack of historicity, or a cultural logic of forgetting, which is “less our personal fault or problem than it is a systemic one” (“Cultural Marxism” 15). He makes a case for “the peculiar disappearance of the American past in general, which comes before us in unreal costumes and by way of spurious images” and the strange “way in which the American past, and most particularly its great radical traditions, have been stamped out in almost every generation” (14). This “pathological feature of contemporary society” has, in Jameson’s thinking, “obliterated from any living collective consciousness” the memories needed to feel connected to the American past and to mobilize American history in another way (15, 14). He claims this is a “repression both of the past and of any imaginable future,” which is “far more intense than in any other social formation in human history” (15). The historical amnesia marks a fundamental temporal reorientation that moves away from the past and toward the future without a sense of what either of these directions holds. Locked into the present, in a version of Zelazny’s

¹²⁹ As rapper Vince Staples puts it, “We live for they amusement like they view us from behind the glass / No matter what we grow into, we never gonna escape our past / So in this cage they made for me, exactly where you find me at” (“Like It Is,” *Summertime '06*: 2015). In Kodak Black words, “Fuck a paragraph, they gave my dawg a sentence” (“Benji’s,” *Heart of the Projects*: 2014). Gucci Mane: “I spent half of my life nigga sellin’ crack cocaine / I’m a victim of the dope game / Gucci Mane didn’t graduate, but guess what, I’m a trap scholar” (“Scholar,” *Trap God 2*: 2013). Ralo says, “I went and bought a mic off some motherfuckin’ pills / Remember middle school, man they told me crack kills / Nigga fuck that, nigga crack pay bills” (“I Hope It Don’t Jam,” 2017). Maxo Kream: “I had to work like a slave my nigga / No hands out, just gave, my nigga / Fuck the judge and police, / they tryna hang a nigga” (“Change,” 2019). Referring to prison, Young Thug says: “I miss Unfoonk he just waiting on my visit / I’m scared to go down there, them folk might just railroad the cheeks” (*1017 Thug 2*: 2014). The lyrics take Weheliye’s points in the order he does.

“blindspin,” this is experienced as dislocation and disorientation (*The Dream Master* 11).¹³⁰ A loss of history and lack of futurity is both the cause and the effect of philosophical presentism that has left us stranded between an unremembered past and an inconceivable future. Past and future now feel unreal, but so does the present. This alienation of labor and estrangement from culture in late capitalism are part of the void at the very center of postmodern existence which the Parable books respond to in articulating even the remote possibility of dealienated labor (as seen in *Acorn*) and of recaptured culture (as seen in *Earthseed*). The cultural project of undoing repressive desublimation while finding new modes of sublimation, of finding a new future from only an obliterated past, and of making a new kind of ‘group psychology’ in the face of the old paranoid mindset is exactly what we are likewise tasked with. Literary critic Jerry Phillips argues that “*Parable of the Sower* is essentially a critique of ‘civilization and its discontents’” and that this makes “Freud's analysis of the link between class society and the psychic disintegration of the individual...directly relevant to the world depicted in *Parable of the Sower*” (305). He then cites an excerpt of Freud to support his view although it seems to work against what he just established:

If... a culture has not got beyond a point at which the satisfaction of one portion of its participants depends upon the suppression of another...it is understandable that the suppressed people should develop an intense hostility towards a culture whose existence they make possible by their work, but in whose wealth they have too small a share.... It goes without saying that a civilization which leaves so large a number of its participants unsatisfied and drives them into revolt neither has nor deserves the prospect of a lasting experience (*The Future of an Illusion*: 1927, 12).

Presumably, the critique that Phillips refers to is located in the “drives them into revolt” part of the

¹³⁰ In Zelazny’s *The Dream Master* (1966), alternately titled *He Who Shapes*, the neologism is described as follows: “Blindspin. A single name of a multitude of practices centered about the auto-driven auto. Flashing across the country ...windows all opaque, night dark, sky high, tires assailing the road below...—and starting from scratch and ending in the same place, and never knowing where you are going or where you have been—it is possible, for a moment...to produce a momentary awareness of self by virtue of an *apartness from all but a sense of motion*. This is because *movement through darkness is the ultimate abstraction of life itself* (11, emphasis mine). Butler’s novels suggest that at the level of the society we might be on this same sort of “auto-driven auto” which does seem significantly less fun.

quotation, because the novel certainly catalogues the “intense hostility” of “the suppressed people” (as well as their “psychic degeneration”). Still, the actions of primal horde, so to speak, are, in my view, a form of revolt. The *Parable* novels seem to be more of a critique of classical Marxism in the sense that these revolts do not qualify as revolutionary. Phillips could be saying that the books seem to suggest the sociopolitical situation might have “the prospect of a lasting experience,” but to this I’d add that’s pretty much what people thought during feudalism. To me, the setting reads more like a warning about what could actually happen in the real-world if we don’t adequately adjust the parameters of our own civilization to meet the needs of the many unsatisfied participants and suppressed peoples within it. Civilization as we know it categorically ends in the novel’s storyline, and the new emerging ‘civilization’ (in company towns and worse) is also a return of residual historical formations (Marx’s “wage-slavery” becomes “debt slavery,” for example) (*Sower* 118). This actually makes the novels track with Michel Foucault’s theoretical work on transformations of power rather than falling back on what Hall refers to as “vulgar marxism” (*Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacy* 264). In fact, Butler’s duology has a fairly outright response to and support of some of Freud’s insights from the very text that Phillips believes it, “like other works in the “utopia/catastrophe genre,” obviously critiques (305).

Freud says, “it is to be expected that these underprivileged classes...will do all they can to free themselves from their own surplus of privation” and “where this is not possible, a permanent measure of discontent will persist within the culture” (*Illusion* 12). In these social “conditions,” he argues, “an internalization of the cultural prohibitions among the suppressed people is not to be expected” (*ibid.*).¹³¹ Freud then proceeds to wrongfully equate the “extent to which a civilization’s

¹³¹ In Vince Staples: “Heaven or hell, boy / freedom or jail, boy / The police kill us, so we made up our own laws” (“Like It Is,” *Summertime* ’06: 2015).

precepts have been internalized” to “the moral level of its participants,” which is wildly untrue and decidedly so in the American history and afterlife of slavery (ibid.).¹³² But, Freud also says this ideological indoctrination “is not the only form of mental wealth” that determines a “civilization’s value” because “there are in addition its assets in the shape of ideals and artistic creations,” and the “satisfactions that can be derived from those sources” (ibid.). While Herbert Marcuse’s “The Affirmative Character of Culture” (1937) will critique these ideas with his notion of “surplus repression” and “repressive desublimation,” Freud’s insights are not easily dismissed in regard to contemporary counterculture(s), especially if we ascribe to the artwork a causal, determining power as a cognitive and affective driver in the course of human history (Marcuse; Anderson).¹³³ In many ways, I suggest, countercultural art—primarily music—has come in to fill the spiritual needs left unmet in the masses of modern people who without it would lead lives of (literally) quiet desperation.¹³⁴ Discontent does not automatically become political action; particularly in the

¹³² Marcus Tullius Cicero creates an apt response to this view of civilization in relation to its various moral prohibitions: “The enemy is within the gates. It is with our own luxury, our own folly, our own criminality that we have to contend” (qtd. in Williams 59).

¹³³ Affirmative culture, or a “specific, historical form of culture” is a bourgeois claim that culture’s “obligatory values ...should...permeate and transfigure ‘from above’” (95). As the “abstract equality of men realizes itself in capitalist production as concrete inequality,” this form of culture “affirms and conceals the new conditions of social life” (97, 95). Like Freud’s views on civilization, Marcuse’s “affirmative culture” is a tool to create “not so much a better world as a nobler one” (103). In his essay, the adage, “man does not live by bread alone,” represents the false bourgeois sleight-of-hand, wherein “spiritual nourishment is an adequate substitute for too little bread” (109). More recently, the union slogan, “we want bread, and roses too,” redeems this sentiment in a way that neither discards the spiritual insight nor sidesteps the social critique whereby “lift[ing] the spiritual world...out of its social context” depoliticizes it (101).

¹³⁴ Young Thug cites the new religious quality of his music in his song, “Tabernacle” (2013): “I’m true to my religion, / I’m live from the tabernacle” (1017 *Thug*). The tabernacle first referred to in Exodus: 25 of the *Torah* is the portable place of worship (sometimes a tent) for the Israelites to use during their period of wandering before the Promised Land arrives (or they arrive to it). This allusion’s imagery is evocative of the transitional era of religious dearth that Butler’s novels also respond to in *Earthseed*. In *Revelation*, this New Jerusalem is said to be God’s “Tabernacle” (21:3). This portable place of worship, especially understood as a tent, clearly references modern music festivals as a concert venue in which the live performance the song refers to is held and as a postmodern place of worship in a period of wandering. I want to acknowledge the fact that this musical legacy hails from that of Sun Ra and from other Afrofuturist musicians who are cited by Nisi Shawl alongside Yoruba spirits and the likes of Lilly, McKenna, and the drug counterculture. The cultural ‘texts’ I cite in the footnotes are tie into Butler’s project in the way that they directly cite from the Bible and rework that religious text within their own, as does Butler, as does Rasta, and so on; these artists are doing what Stuart Hall refers to as “language-ing” and speaking in the language in which people have already been “language’d”; they are transgressive and intensifications of drug, music, and youth subcultures of the sixties that relate more to black oppositional culture, black power, and Afropessimism; they sample thinkers, speakers, and singers of previous eras in ways not recognized and dismissed before they can register as what they are to people not predisposed to read them

postmodern period, it is, well, pain; “All pain feels the same,” Lauren says. While formative in the modern period, as Anderson argues, the “newspaper” seems a relatively weak form of postmodern “mass ceremony,” which is largely cognitive and/or often negatively affective; conversely, music seems a powerfully postmodern update of the critical concept, which is deeply affective without losing its cognitive valence (35). Larkin finds her Church choir important even in absence of belief. In *Sower*, Lauren says, “He wasn’t a sharer. He didn’t understand that to me pain was evil (196).”¹³⁵ Earthseed is an example of a counterculture created as direct response to this overwhelming sense of pain, and which ardently seeks to alleviate it through new forms of ritualized action and religious sublimation as both a compensatory and curative measure. The altered states it offers are certainly reparative, but they are also paranoid about the nature of altered states in the more celebratory mode, which is unfortunate in my reading of Earthseed. The untapped reservoirs other texts in my

for that or at all. For example, Kodak Black samples Malcolm X, Lil Wayne samples Ray Charles, Kanye West samples Nina Simone, Damian Marley samples Marcus Garvey, Freddie Gibbs samples The Moments, Young Thug samples The Persuasions, and DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid, Death Grips, and Azealia Banks sample Sun Ra, etc.. Wyclef Jean, the son of a preacher, is named after the biblical scholar John Wycliffe, a professor who in 1382 produced the first hand-written Bible manuscript in the English language. An idol of Young Thug’s, Wyclef Jean does Haitian rap music and Caribbean gospel music. He also samples his father’s sermons in his songs. Other examples of this style of music (rap) as drawing on altered states, trance, and religion abound but two more in the religion category are: Kodak Black’s “Calling my Spirits” (2018): “And it’s like every song I’m on I be calling my spirits” (*Dying to Live*). Lajan Slim’s “No Hook” (2017): “God protect my family, / Niggas hate me, but they hated Jesus, / I’m a born sinner / When you rap you preach the word / ... / Lost some niggas, they in heaven / Lajan Slim: A Living Legend.” Finally, the rapper Clipping is worth mentioning as his “Air ‘Em Out” (2016) overtly alludes to Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987-1989) and Delany’s “Aye, and Gomorrah” (1967) in a few lines that give what is definitely not an Afrofuturist reading of either Butler’s “Oankali” or Delany’s “frelks”:

Try to play a killer soft like silk (Soft) / Ol’ Frelk-ass gotta pay for the milk / Lies high off these lows when they step up in the party / Where they got up in they O’s like some fucking Oankalis / So it’s whips and chains (Chains), that’s they game (Yup) / ... / What you gon’ do about it? Ain’t nothing new about it / Should’ve made the noose a little tighter / ‘Cause it ain’t nobody dead, just some muh’fuckin’ riders / Air ‘em out (Let ‘em breathe), / air ‘em out (Got the fire!).

¹³⁵ Young Thug’s track, “Oh Ya” (2014), “No more pain though / ... / No more pain bro, no more pain sir / I’m standin’ in the rain, / I know you feel my pain through my veins, / Oh Ya” (*1017 Thug 2*). Future’s track “Hardly” (2014) joins music, drug culture, and altered states: “Wash the molly down with champagne / Wash the xanny down with syrup yo / Hope it take away all this damn pain / I pour my life inside these poems / My whole soul and my spirit / Tryna find right in my wrong / Hope my legacy live on / That’s why I wrote this song / I ain’t have to write this song” (*Monster*). As Kodak Black puts it in his “Close to the Grave” (2018): “Everybody say that I changed, say I ain’t been the same / They don’t even know I’m feelin’ pain / They don’t know how I feel inside, traumatized, criminalized / But yet I’m idolized, I swear to God sometimes I wonder why” (*Dying to Live*).

dissertation's archive delve into more deeply with altered states are more about losing control than reasserting care and revival is what necessary to survival. If there isn't magic in the world than who is really going to feel in any way a part of it? The sharers could serve to enhance various cultic rituals, like in music, festivals, dancing, parties, drugs, and/or group sex, but instead we get:

Once or twice
each week
A gathering of Earthseed
is a good and necessary thing.
It vents emotion, then quiets the mind.
It focuses attention,
Strengthens purpose, and unifies people (*Talents* 192).

Careful on three times a week—that's really pushing it! Then, it's simply an overindulgence like "the battle with John Barleycorn" that Bateson discusses at great length in relation to the self-help group alcoholics anonymous, alcoholism, and the cybernetics of the self. The neighbors with the marijuana and moonshine businesses always seemed like something that sharers would really dig.

In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Freud argues one of man's fundamental instincts is aggression, and it is only partially tempered by assimilation into civilization. Man is said to be, in the absence of these socializing circumstances, "a savage beast to whom consideration towards his own kind is something alien" (69). This recalls Butler's "Monophobic Response" in which she says that aliens in SF are always actually other humans. Strangely supporting a more postcolonial reading of her texts she doesn't always explicitly note. Because of this alienness, "*civilized society* is perpetually threatened with *disintegration* [as] instinctual passions are stronger than reasonable interests" (ibid., emphasis mine). There are some serious issues in this reading, but I'll use Hall's critique of Marx, reapplied to Freud, which, is found in "the profound Eurocentrism of marxist [and freudian] theory"; as Hall elucidates, the very idea that "capitalism evolved organically from within in own transformations" is categorically untrue, and even more so in the American context:

It is not just a matter of where Marx happened to be born...but of the model at the centre of the most developed parts of marxist theory, which suggested that capitalism evolved organically from within its own transformations. Whereas I came from a society where the profound integument of capitalist society, economy, and culture had been imposed by conquest and colonization. This is a theoretical, not a vulgar critique. I don't blame Marx because of where he was born; I'm questioning the theory for the model around which it is articulated: its Eurocentrism (qtd. in *Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacy* 264).

Freud believes “the fateful question for the human species” is whether “civilization” will find the means to accommodate its so-called “discontents”; or, said again, whether “cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of...communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction” (*Civilization and its Discontents* 111). Freud writes, “With every tool man is perfecting his own organs, whether motor or sensory,” or trying to “remov[e] the limits to their functioning” (43). In this way, “Man has...become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble” (44). In *The Medium is the Message* (1964), Marshall McLuhan argues that “extensions” afforded by new technology and media effectively blind us to its “amputations”; he relates this to “the Freudian concept of repression” and explains, “from the phonetic alphabet to the computer,” these “new extensions of man and the environment they generate are the central manifestations of the evolutionary process” (4, 5). Freud and McLuhan believe that “our survival” is based “on understanding the nature of our new environment” as a “total and near-instantaneous transformation of culture, values and attitudes” (5). This Earthseed verse is almost verbatim Freud:

Civilization is to groups what intelligence is to individuals. It is a means of combining the intelligence of many to achieve ongoing group adaptation. Civilization, like intelligence, may serve well, serve adequately, or fail to serve its adaptive function. When *civilization* fails to serve, it must *disintegrate* unless it is acted upon by unifying internal or external forces (*Sower* 101, emphasis mine).¹³⁶

¹³⁶ In a way, this is how Butler's novel portray McHale's “literal disintegrative experience” of cyberpunk SF and postmodernist fiction. The scale is now at the level of the society as a whole which is also literally disintegrating (256).

Bruce Sterling's novelette, *Swarm* (1982), similarly notes, "Intelligence is a great bother. It makes all kinds of trouble for us" (19). The hive mind is an alien race—called "the Swarm"—or, when "she" is individuated, "Swarm"; when she is awakened by the attempts to enslave and steal from her colony, Swarm says to the galactic military leader: "*You are a young race and lay great stock by your own cleverness...As usual, you fail to see that intelligence is not a survival trait*" (19, emphasis mine). As Metzinger says, "Consciousness [itself] is a new kind of *organ*," which is "virtual" by nature, meaning that like "the immune response, which is realized only when needed, [it] is another example of a virtual organ" (56, emphasis in original). In an interview, Metzinger explains "recent mind-wandering research" that shows in 30-50% of waking hours the "epistemic self" seems to disappear, slipping into "what can be termed introspective neglect—systematically in-built blind spots," made up of different states of conscious awareness and experience such as in "peak" (sports, adrenalin), "flow" (work, focus), or "distraction" (daydream, spacing-out) states (qtd. in "The Nature of Consciousness," Sam Harris: Episode 96). These are the most typical on the spectrum of altered states but they nevertheless are a milder, everyday version of exactly that. Swarm is "comes online," so to speak, when something rouses her from her "sleep-mode" or there is a problem that her conscious mind needs to troubleshoot much like an immune system response. Metzinger calls this a "self-representational blink—black shutters in one's intuitive sense of self," and clarifies, "Virtual organs are like physical organs...they are coherent assemblies of functional properties that allow you to do new things...unlike a liver or a heart, they are realized transiently" ("Consciousness" 96). Butler's verse takes Freud's notion that as "civilization" is to the group, so "intelligence" to the individual; just as Sterling compares the entire colony "Swarm" to the singular "consciousness" of an individual. When individuated, Swarm 'wakes up' to deal with the problem of the invading humans, much like Metzinger describes the "virtual organ" of "consciousness" that

“comes online” to realize itself (*Ego Tunnel* 56). *Parable* is a call for us—as a group civilization comprised of intelligent individuals—to ‘wake up’ to the reality of our shared circumstances so we might mitigate the damage we’ve done to each other and ourselves over a sustained period of rapid-fire technological upheavals, which have been incorporated largely unconsciously into the social and singular practices of everyday life. This rereading of Butler’s cult novels works “towards articulating those elements of the political unconscious in which the contradictions of history and the process of change carried on by the collectivity...[can be] registered, temporarily resolved, and opened up in the preconceptual figures of these literary artifacts” (*Demand* 45-46). In Anderson’s terms, “self-consciously” held beliefs, practices, and ideologies have also impressed themselves upon less obvious aspects of the period’s “unselfconscious coherence,” which is the cognitive and affective space that the internal and external “force” of *Sower* and *Talents* attempts to reshape (16).

tomorrow calling

I just wrote down *dreams aren't fake*. I don't know what this means.
(Acker, 1993: 193).

To attend to modern technology’s negative effects and recent affect, Butler “turned to one of the oldest and most transformative human technologies, the one science fiction had tended to dismiss as a primitive artifact of the superstitious past: religion” (Canavan 127). As Butler said in discussing the continued relevance of religion and which clarifies its use in her novels, “I’ve met science fiction people who say, ‘Oh, well, we’re going to outgrow it,’ and I don’t believe that for one moment” (Butler qtd. in Canavan 127). An Earthseed aphorism goes further, describing how,

Intelligence is ongoing, individual adaptability. Adaptations that an intelligent species may make in a single generation, other species make over many generations of selective breeding and selective dying. Yet intelligence is demanding. If it is misdirected by accident or by intent, it can foster its own orgies of breeding and dying (*Sower* 29).

This Earthseed verse locates culture as the transformative site of human evolution, a move that reworks evolutionary discourse regarding survival of the fittest (and its misapplication in social Darwinism), which seems to loom large in other parts of Lauren's journals and in the two novels taken together. Identifying "intelligence" with "ongoing, individual adaptability," then in the next sentence widening the frame toward the "adaptations that an intelligent species [might] make in a single generation," sutures the individual to the social body (instead of subsuming the former in 'species-being' and/or discarding the latter in libertarian survivalism). Butler forges a connection between individual development and cultural evolution as co-constitutive forces locked together in dialectical relation and always working in tandem. It also strongly suggests, in keeping with most evolutionary biologists, that genetic evolution (natural selection through the replication and mutation of genes) is less important to an "intelligent species" than mimetic evolution (cultural selection through the replication and mutation of memes). Butler's SF and religious interventions into cultural evolution creates a reply to Jameson's observation that competition has not been the 'cohesive' force structuring human life and social relations until the recent advent of modernity:

With one signal exception (capitalism itself, which is organized around an economic mechanism), there has never existed a cohesive form of human society that was not based on some form of transcendence or religion ("Cognitive Mapping" 355).

The "signal," as biologist and myrmecologist Deborah Gordan says, "is in the pattern of contact" (*Ants at Work* 169). And, for the human species under the conditions of late capitalism, noise and the signal have never been more difficult to discriminate. The new religion of Earthseed's verses and the near-future dystopian SF allows readers to listen for what "sounds true" in a resonant and dissonant sounding ("Pedagogy" 166). The uncomfortably familiar setting can be likened to what is described in William Hubbard's *Musical Dictionary* (1908), as atypical harmony or anomalous

chords are "chord[s] containing an interval" that have "been made very sharp or flat in tempering the scale for instruments of fixed pitches" (103-104). Earthseed's verses, on the other hand, also create an unusual sonic effect, which to some might be compared to 'atonal' music of the Eastern world; or, depending on one's ear, might 'ring' true with overtones from hitting on a fundamental frequency of philosophy and philology.

"The great weakness of evolutionary/progressive styles of thought" is it lacks "any idea of continuity," answering real human needs with only a cold "hostility" and "silence" (Anderson 51).

The great merit of traditional religious world-views...has been their concern with man-in-the-cosmos, man as species being, and the contingency of life. The extraordinary survival over thousands of years of Buddhism, Christianity or Islam in dozens of different social formations attests to their imaginative response to the overwhelming burden of human suffering—disease, mutilation, grief, age, and death (51).

In a myriad of different ways, "religious thought also responds...by transforming fatality into continuity (karma, original sin, etc.)," which is what constructs the critical "links between the dead and the yet unborn, the mystery of re-generation" (51). Olamina's Earthseed verses speak to this idea of continuity outside the bounds of the nationalism Anderson theorizes: "Alone, / Each of us is mortal. / Yet through Earthseed, / Through the Destiny, / We join. / We are purposeful / Immortal / Life!" (*Talents* 237). Another verse again emphasizes the double-bind of fatality and immortality and of change and continuity with something that sounds more like Eastern beliefs in reincarnation (or the third chapter of Ecclesiastes), by saying, "We have lived before. / We will live again. / ... / Again, / Always again, / Forevermore." (262). In Olamina's thinking, the destiny of "extrasolar colonization" is "'a form of species reincarnation,' requiring first, in some sense, the death of the old one" (qtd. in Canavan 146). Another Earthseed verse offers this sentiment as well but adds on an evolutionary and developmental vocabulary to it: "Earthseed is the dawning adulthood / of the human species. It offers the only / true Immortality" (*Talents* 325). Yet as the previous verse

suggests, re-generation *is* a type of immortality (or reincarnation), which we may know, yet not realize.¹³⁷ As Sedgwick says, in Buddhism, there is a distinction “between knowing and *realizing*” (“Pedagogy” 167).¹³⁸ As Anderson points out, from “the birth of...vernaculars” to the rise of nations as “imagined communities,” our concept of civilization is a very young view, which reiterates this idea of ‘civilization’ not as the apex of human evolution but an adolescence of sorts (41). This again reframes popular discourses subtended by Darwin’s evolutionary theory as the site in which neither religious nor secular interventions into the social can or do actually operate. Even though “religion has no necessary political connotation,” as Hall says, “there are powerful, immensely strong...‘lines of tendential force’ articulating that religious formation to political, economic, and ideological structures”; undeniably, “to use a geographical metaphor, to struggle around religion in [a] country, you need to know the ideological terrain, the lay of the land” (“postmodernism” 142) “If you are...to try to break, contest, or interrupt...these tendential historical connections,” then “you have to know when you are moving against the grain of historical formations” (143).

Those historical connections define the ways in which the ideological terrain of a particular society has been mapped out. They are the ‘traces’ which Gramsci (1971) mentioned: the ‘stratified deposits in popular philosophy’ (324), which no longer have an inventory, but which establish and define the fields along which ideological struggle is *likely* to move” (“The problem of ideology: marxism without guarantees” 42-43, emphasis in original).

This idea of “stratified deposits in popular philosophy” is a way of naming “common sense” as “a historical, not a natural or universal or spontaneous form of popular thinking,” which picks up on

¹³⁷ In “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985), cultural anthropologist Donna Haraway argues, “We have all been injured, profoundly. We require regeneration, not rebirth, and the possibilities for our reconstitution include the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world” (181).

¹³⁸ After walking into a tree, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody “became famous” for saying, “I saw it, but I did not *realize* it” (Ronda 261, emphasis in original). Sedgwick cites “a distinctively Buddhist opening out of the psychology and phenomenology of knowing” because of the way Buddhism’s “psychology of learning” understands that “the fact of recognition itself is an end as well as a means of Buddhist knowing” (“Pedagogy” 167).

aspects of Frantz Fanon's 1967 definition of "race as a sedimented history" ("marxism without guarantees" 43; Fanon 188-189). Hall notes that "this network of pre-existing traces and common-sense elements constitutes the realm of practical thinking for the masses of the people," so it is "precisely on this terrain that ideological struggle" must take place ("marxism" 43).

Lauren sees a need in the world that she seeks to seed with something that can sustain herself and those around her, and which she effectively propagates in *Sower* with the success of the Acorn commune. Unfortunately, when the Acorn settlement is uprooted by fundamentalist Christians in *Talents*, Olamina decides to rethink her religious platform, so it's not as easily deracinated and has a chance to grow on other planets. These two divergent strategies align with the biblical parables invoked by Butler in the titles of each work—in *Sower*, Lauren gathers believers together in Acorn with a sort of local activism which still has wide-ranging possibilities, whereas in *Talents*, Olamina scatters Earthseed beliefs onto far-away places and planets without attending to the word as the seed. As it says in the Bible, "When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another," which in *Talents*, is what Olamina chooses to do in Earthseed's flight from Earth (NRSV, Matthew 10:23). The end of the second novel is a recasting of American history transmuted from the past into an imagined future, which produces a shock of recognition that doesn't fully register until the name of the ship is revealed as the "*Christopher Columbus*" (*Talents* 406, emphasis in original).¹³⁹ In *Demand the Impossible* (1986), Moylan says,

In so far as America has been conceived as utopia since the early European explorations, a critical question in the 1960s was the shape of the American Dream that was emerging, or being denied, in the period of post-war affluence—a period which also included the repression necessary to achieve that affluent society sought by the dominant powers (46).

¹³⁹ "Madhu Dubey writes that '[t]he dystopia presented in *Parable of the Sower* is so closely extrapolated from current trends, as Stephen Potts observes, that it produces a shock of familiarity rather than estrangement' (106)" (qtd. in Phillips 300). My comment on the end of the second novel as creating 'a shock of recognition' is adapted from Dick's "My Definition of SF" (1981); "the shock of dysrecognition" names a secondary effect of a "conceptual dislocation."

Larkin's commentary on the beginnings of the religious cult makes this comparison overt earlier in *Talents*, when she writes: "The original 13 settlers of Acorn, and thus the original 13 members of Earthseed, were my mother, of course..." (22). Not only does this numerically match up with the original 13 colonies established by the first European settlers in early American history, who also left their homeland in search of better lives and religious freedom, it also, in its inclusion of Olamina as a Christ-figure, is a repetition of Jesus and his twelve disciples. The former exposes how the ending of *Talents* is freighted with the baggage of these historical contradictions which have not been resolved in the U.S. context, and yet seem to be repeating again rather ominously in a sort of Earthseed manifest destiny—Christian pilgrims travelling on ships over the ocean to unknown worlds intent on a Puritan promised land have a direct parallel in Earthseed followers travelling on spaceships across the galaxy to unknown planets intent on their dream of a similar kind. The latter suggests that the narrative arc of *Sower* is in keeping with the biblical account of Jesus' life—Olamina's 'disciples' were "highway converts" that she found as she "walked" and "convinced them to walk...with her in their long trek north" (22-23). This exodus, thematized in a forced migration, has biblical overtones. Deepening this messianic analogy, Olamina describes a "river" of displaced peoples "flooding north," saying, "I should be fishing that river even as I follow its current" (200). This recalls the biblical teaching regarding teaching a man to fish, as well as well-known imagery of 'the Jesus fish.' Of course, it also suggests the Earthseed verse: "Drowning people / sometimes die / Fighting their rescuers" (54).

In her Earthseed notebook, dated June 7, 2025, Lauren writes: "A tree / Cannot grow / In its parents' shadows" (*Sower* 82). A week later, Lauren continues writing in her personal journal after listening to "a long report on the radio" discussing how some of the "new worlds" that have been "discovered" in outer space "may be life-bearing" (83). She says, "a living world might be

easier for us to adapt to and live on without a long, expensive umbilical to Earth...I think people who traveled to extrasolar worlds would be on their own...Well out of the shadow of their parent world” (83). What Lauren misses in her desire to leave the shadow of her father’s Christianity, as well as in her observation about trees, is the deep roots that connect her and Earthseed to them; a Mother tree remains connected to her saplings under the surface in a rhizomatic network, like an umbilical cord, which is a subterranean source of nutrients and communication between trees. In this way, trees like truths evolve and take on new forms while still remaining entangled with one another—as in the relation of Judaism to Christianity, for example. Butler’s invocation of biblical parables runs much deeper than either Lauren and later Olamina’s outright dismissal may on the surface seem to suggest. By using parable of the sower and parable of the talents, Butler creates a metacommentary on Lauren/Olamina that encompasses the action and arc of each novel. Mother earth is not, as the drafts and notes for *Trickster* will show, in addition to various interviews and statements made by Butler, an umbilical cord that we want to (or can) sever if we really do want to survive; despite the dreams of SF, the earth is not incidental or replaceable, nor separate from our species but an intrinsic part of our own selves that is essential to our life cycle. And the stars are not far away. The extreme violence the Acorn community experiences while in a Christian ‘deprogramming’ or internment camp scripts a traumatic turning point for Olamina’s character, which takes her vision for Earthseed in what I argue is the wrong direction. As Butler explains in a 2004 interview with Nisi Shawl, “in my *Parable* books, I try to save the world,” which lends a textual support to a reading in which leaving Earth is not the true destiny described by Olamina in her Earthseed verses (or in Butler’s *Parable* books) (*Strange Matings* 170). Now, if Butler had said, ‘in my *Parable* books, I try to save *humanity*,’ then there would be more ambiguity as to whether interstellar space colonization represented a literal fulfillment of the destiny or if it was perhaps a

distortion of the deeper truth that the parables—the Bible’s and Butler’s—keep hidden as a generic feature. Olamina seems to be trying to save *humanity*, but Butler explicitly states in these two novels, she’s trying to save *the world*, which means humanity has to be seen as both instrumental to and intrinsically a part of this bigger world-saving project. As Butler explains in another interview included in Nanda and Crosby’s “Introduction” to *God Is Change: Religious Practices and Ideologies in the Works of Octavia Butler* (2021):

I had in mind how certain historical populations have used religion to focus a group toward long-term goals—such as building cathedrals or the pyramids. I wanted Lauren to envision, but then also to focus the Earthseed group toward, the goal of changing human attitudes about the treatment of the Earth and each other (qtd. in Mehaffy and Keating 75).

At the end of *Talents*, Olamina reflects on her Earthseed vision in similar terms, but without the focus on the Earth: “I wanted us to understand what we could be, what we could do. I wanted to give us focus, a goal, something big enough to make us become more than we ever have been” (321). In *Talents*, Olamina says, “We keep falling into the same ditches, you know?”; she goes on to speculate that “there seem to be solid biological reasons why we are the way we are. If there weren’t, the cycles wouldn’t keep replaying” (321). Olamina’s language echoes Butler’s own in an interview two years before its publication, entitled “We keep playing the same record” (Potts Interview 333). Six years after *Talents*, Butler resounds Olamina in discussing the Parable books with Nisi Shawl, saying, “These are books that take a look at what we’re doing and where we’re liable to wind up and how we’re liable to...what way we can climb out of it” (“A Conversation with Octavia E. Butler” 172). “Actually,” she adds, there are “several ways but only one of them works” (172). This warrants taking a closer look at the novels to determine what exactly Butler means: which of the “several ways” we might “climb out” of “the same ditches” is the “only one of them [that] works”? To use Burroughs’s language (re)mixed with Butler’s idiom, if we are to

break the broken record of “pre-recorded present time,” which is “set to record and playback,” we must learn how “to program [our] own playback” through the “study [of our] associational patterns” (“The Invisible Generation” 338).

As Katherine Hayles says of postmodern writing, “the single most important device is the insistent pressure to take metaphors literally” (213). In Burroughs’s work, this intense “pressure toward literalization can be seen in narrative sections that use the conventions of SF to figure the invasion of the word as a physical operation” (214). In my reading, Butler’s cult novels reverse the directionality of this ‘operation,’ in which the reader assumes that the ‘conventions of science fiction’ have remained intact; however, the use of the biblical parables in the titles flags the fact that this cursory reading is not sufficient for understanding the meaning of these novels. In the Bible’s parable of the sower, the ‘invasion of the word’ is also rendered as ‘a physical operation,’ and the parable is the means by which it enters into the heart of the listeners. The parable of the sower, also known as parable of the soils, refers to the seed which is the word and the soil which is the heart. Though the second parable is not as clear-cut, in this first parable, the sower is the speaker who stands-in for Jesus, as well as the scribe who stands-in for his disciples. I argue that the misreading of Butler’s New Wave SF Parables is a direct result of the failure to re-read these biblical parables, or even to grasp the genre in which the parables are written. This represents a nonliteral reading practice that is foregrounded by New Wave writers as a mode of ‘literary’ SF, but it is equally relevant to reading the parables of the Bible. I argue Olamina’s misreading is “based on taking one’s own metaphors literally, which is a...mistake,” which is reproduced in scholarly misreading(s) of Butler’s novels (“postmodernism” 138). My reading incorporates the post-structuralist insight that sees “meaning not as natural” but rather as an effect caused by “the intervention of ideology into language” (137). The ideologies in play are both literary and literal;

SF is a literary genre that typically uses literal language and devices, whereas parables are a literary genre that typically uses nonliteral language and metaphors. New Wave SF, in Dick's terminology, is an "orthogonal" articulation of the different ways language is used across what are seemingly contrary cultural formations ("My Definition" 81). One Earthseed verse in particular encapsulates this double movement of inner and outer space, which placing Butler's Parable books alongside the American New Wave brings to the forefront: "The Destiny of Earthseed / Is to take root among the stars. / ... / It is to explore the vastness / Of heaven, / It is to explore the vastness / Of ourselves" (*Talents* 276). Another echoes the beginning, "God is neither good / nor evil, / ... / God is Change. / We must find the rest of what we need / within ourselves, / in one another, / in our Destiny" (*Sower* 245). Does it "Sound True" yet? It will. So, while the Destiny of Earthseed, Olamina says, is to "take root among the stars," the 'grounding metaphor' of the New Wave is inner space, which I point to as both the literary and religious message in Butler's New Wave SF parables (77). The biography of Sojourner Truth contains a quotation given not long before her death: "I'm not going to die, I'm going home like a shooting star."¹⁴⁰ The New Wave reading suggests, as does Butler, that Olamina's interpretation of Earthseed's destiny, and our own reading of it in the novels, has been misinformed by the historical genre of traditional SF and by the surface reading of the biblical parables. As Ballard says of Burroughs's New Wave SF, particularly—*The Soft Machine* (1961) and *The Ticket that Exploded* (1962)—"What appear to be the science fictional elements...in fact play a metaphorical role" ("Myth Maker of the Twentieth Century" 129). I'm suggesting that a return to the dreams and parables is what is needed in order to decode this reading from these texts. Jesus was a real far-out dude. As Hubbard said, "just a shade or two about clear" (qtd. in Parks). On a "tone scale." Earth tones? Dial tones. Oh...I see.

¹⁴⁰ South Park Mexican reworks it: "Who ya, who ya think you are? / You're fuckin' with a Dope House shootin' star" ("Mary-Go-Round" *Hustle Town*: 1998). Or, Young Thug says: "Told that ho that I'm a shootin' star just wish away" ("Shooting Star," *1017 Thug*: 2013).

Parabolic Poetry

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God – and the word was flesh... human flesh... in the beginning of writing. (Burroughs, 1989: 11)

In the Bible, Jesus teaches using parables, defined as “stories describing situations in everyday life which, as Jesus used them, convey a spiritual meaning” (New Revised Standard Version 1187). Parables are a genre knowingly invoked by Jesus which are by definition literary rather than literal with regard to their language-use, which accounts in part for the difficulty that arises from their interpretation(s). Their non-literal usage is captured by Olamina’s father, and is adapted by Olamina, yet neither reading is sufficient when put in conversation with the primary texts cited in the titles, not to mention the new content and context introduced by Butler’s New Wave SF parable(s). Giving an initial gloss on the literary and biblical genre, Olamina writes:

My father loved parables—stories that taught, stories that presented ideas and morals in ways that made pictures in people’s minds. He used the ones he found in the Bible, the ones he plucked from history, or from folk tales, and of course he used those he saw in his life and the lives of people he knew. He wove stories into his Sunday sermons, his Bible classes, and his computer-delivered lectures...because he believed stories were so important as teaching tools (*Talents* 14).¹⁴¹

In the beginning of *Sower*, Lauren tells Jo her first ideas on survivalism, saying, “I think we should bury money and other necessities in the ground where thieves won’t find them” (58). Although we won’t get a direct citation of Jesus’ parable of the talents until the opening dream sequence of the second novel, Lauren has obliquely referenced this parable in her literal take on its content (a servant buries his master’s ‘talent’—or money—in the ground to keep it safe until his return). Jo replies, “You’ve been reading too many adventure stories,” which is an offhanded comment as

¹⁴¹ In the chapter of *The Ticket that Exploded* (1961) entitled, “The Invisible Generation,” Burroughs writes in the midst of a wall of text describing audio experiments: “do you get the picture” (339).

well as a metafictional commentary on the popular genres being re-appropriated and reworked in Butler's narrative (58). In *Talents*, Olamina's journal entries from Acorn show how her early practices have developed and entered into the community; "at *Gathering*," she plans to tell people to "have more drills, and *scatter* more caches of money, food, weapons, records, and valuables" (21, emphasis mine). Again, this creates a metafictional commentary that refers to the text of Butler's second novel, which is only available to readers through Larkin's archival work in "[g]athering" the "caches of...records" that Acorn "scatter[ed]" prior to their internment in the concentration camp (21). The words "Gathering" and "scatter" are another specific citation of the Bible's parable of the talents—though not from the version Olamina knows from memory—and that shows up in the opening *Talents* dream sequence. In her dream, excerpts from the parable of the talents are from "the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew" and derive from Lauren's upbringing and education in the Authorized King James Version of the Bible (AV), which is also the version cited at the conclusion of the novel (*Talents* 14-15; 407-408). Significantly, the AV does not use the precise language of both "gathering" and "scatter," which Butler places in Olamina's journals in the same sentence as a cue for the biblically minded reader because those exact words are used in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This communicates that while Olamina is using the AV exclusively in her biblical citations, Butler's duology is moving across at least the AV and the NRSV translations of the biblical parables. The failure to consult these biblical versions and variations in order to track their translations and transcriptions is a rather stark critical and interpretive error that has led to what in the scholarship appears as an impoverished reading of Butler's (re)working of the Bible/parables, Earthseed/verses, and SF/narratives.¹⁴² In the AV, the

¹⁴² In New Wave SF, "the author and protagonist...have the same level of education and linguistic sensibility"; this assumption could not be less true in the Parable books, even though Butler preserves "a close persona relationship" (Taylor 617). Still, it does explain the scholarly neglect of the biblical parables except insofar as they are cited in the text itself by Olamina. Butler's biblical knowledge and educational level is so far in excess of Olamina's that such a

line is written: “Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and *gathering* where thou hast not *strawed*: And I was afraid” (408, emphasis mine). Whereas in the NRSV, the line reads: “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and *gathering* where you did not *scatter*, so I was afraid” (Matthew 25:24, emphasis mine). In the AV, “servant” and “Lord” replace the NRSV’s use of the words “slave” and “Master,” and while this switch-up might seem slight, it influences the interpretation(s) of the biblical parables that are relayed by characters within the texts.

As Olamina says in the beginning of *Talents*, by way of explicating her father’s reading of the parable of the talents,

My father was a great believer in education, hard work, and personal responsibility. ‘Those are our talents,’ he would say... ‘God has given them to us, and he’ll judge us according to how we use them’ (*Talents* 14-15).

This reading, while literary instead of literal, is also informed by the AV’s use of ‘servant,’ which is familiar in the sense of being ‘the Lord’s servant,’ and which implies that the ‘Lord’ referred to is a stand-in for God himself. These inferences from the language itself are recontextualized in the NRSV, as the terms ‘slave’ and ‘Master’ conjure the American history of black slavery (but could also be read as referring to early Christians who in the Roman Empire were also slaves). In terms of linguistics, the ambiguity arises from the Greek word “*doulos*,” meaning “slave,” as it is used in the original Greco-Roman texts, while early English translations more often worked from the Latin word, “*servus*,” which is closer to “servant” (Miller 19). The well-known abolitionist,

failure misses the “encodings of self-reflexivity,” which are “the salient devices” of New Wave SF with its “heavy emphasis upon the manner in which a story is told” (Blish *quid*. in Bainbridge 87). Similarly, the biblical parable of the sower is ‘literally’ about the word, whereas the biblical parable of the talents is more difficult to parse without making use of the earlier parables. Butler flags these parables as needing to be read together through the titles to her duology. The unpublished third novel, to be named after the parable of the trickster, further clarifies the former two.

statesman, author, and orator, Frederick Douglass, for instance, called Christianity as practiced in the American context, a “slaveholding religion,” which was in direct contradiction with what he termed “the Christianity of Christ”; saying, “I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels” (118). In an interview with *Crisis Magazine*, Butler addresses the same incongruity in the contemporary American context, which strikes at the core of the biblical parables that she chooses to foreground, saying, “I got the impression that for the extreme right during the Reagan administration, capitalism was definitely a religion” (10). This is in keeping with the message in Jesus’ parable of the trickster, which ends with the dictum: “You cannot serve God and wealth” (NRSV, Luke 16:13). Here is the blatant hypocrisy of America’s history—as written by Douglass in his 1845 autobiography and cited in the excerpt below—which is marked by a moral bankruptcy inherent to the political inversion of Christianity (God) put in the service of capitalism (wealth):

We have men-stealers for ministers, women-whippers for missionaries, and cradle-plunderers for church members. The man who wields the blood-clotted cowskin during the week fills the pulpit on Sunday, and claims to be a minister of the meek and lowly Jesus (*Life of Frederick Douglass* 119).¹⁴³

Orlando Patterson’s *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (1993),

Christianity is not the religion of Christ...Not a single statement he made anticipated such a creed, or even less, a church. Many of his most authentic sayings suggest that he believed and practiced just the opposite of what was eventually preached, made, and destroyed in his name...By reclaiming the nonsacrificial religion of the original Jesus movement, the

¹⁴³ The rapper G Herbo updates this sentiment, citing the systemic trap of capitalism and ideology, and the continued hypocrisy of so-called criminal justice which has yet to acknowledge its roots in black slavery. In other words, the man who wields the gavel during court proceedings has not himself experienced economic scarcity and deprivation which drugs and crime are themselves a response to: “Now the judge hang us with 100 years, used to hang us by a tree / I was born in the trap tryna stay up out the penitentiary / Cuz living ain’t cheap tell me how this the land of the free” (“Bottom of the Bottom,” *Ballin’ Like I’m Kobe*: 2015).

revitalized Afro-American Christianity ushered in a political revolution in America not unlike the revolution that Jesus sought for his own colonized ethnic group (XVI-XVII).

This re-centers Butler's use of Jesus' parables as decidedly not aligned with Christianity under capitalism, yet which at the same time are almost certainly involved with the figure of Christ.

Olamina picks up on her father's reading of the AV's parable of the talents but exchanges his American 'values' with her own religious 'talents'; in the biblical parable, the word 'talent' means a sum of money, or more specifically, refers to a unit of measurement used in weighing the 'value' of silver or gold. When the community next-door to Acorn is raided and destroyed, Olamina begins to worry that her strategy for Earthseed's survival and her interpretation of the Bible's parable which informs it might be wrong. This seed of doubt will prove prophetic in the sense that Acorn will soon be subject to the same brutalization that Dovetree experienced, but I argue, it is fatal for the long-term future of Earthseed which Olamina's actions after Acorn will eradicate instead of propagating in the intended arc of Butler's trilogy.¹⁴⁴ Olamina thinks of how to ensure safety "for [her] own people," and protect Earthseed's teachings:

We are now 59 people...With numbers like that, we barely do exist. All the more reason, I suppose, for my dream. *My 'talent,' going back to the parable of the talents, is Earthseed.* And although I haven't buried it in the ground, I have buried it here in these coastal mountains, where it can grow at about the same speed as our redwood trees (*Talents* 21, emphasis mine).

Olamina wonders, "what else could I have done?", because with 'better' numbers, "Earthseed might be a big enough movement...to be a real target," and "would that be better?" (21). This numerical thinking ties right back into her reading of parable of the talents and isolates the two

¹⁴⁴ Butler's writing on Trickster indicates that to the Earthseed colonists, the Earth would no longer represent a hell from which they escaped; it would be collectively rewritten and remembered in their history "'As all that is sweet and beautiful / As all that is good / As Heaven'" (Butler qtd. in Canavan 149).

forms of literalization that stem from it: firstly, Olamina has traded out the biblical word for the modern word (talent/s), much like her father's reading plays on the double-meaning of the word (value/s); secondly, she has indicated a reading which—correctly—recognizes the servant who buries his lord's talent in the ground has acted rightly, or at least tried to, although in the parable itself it seems as if he has not; thirdly, she then skips over the implications of the second point in the application or literalization of these principles in her own life. Her talent is Earthseed, and she has buried it in the hills of Oregon but not, as she notes, in the ground.¹⁴⁵ Acorn represents a seedling whose adult form is a mighty oak, but Olamina is frustrated with the rate of growth (which she believes is too slow) and the number of adherents (which she believes is too small). She is beginning to shift from her reading that the right thing to do with the word is to sow it in good soil (as in parable of the sower), and toward a reading that the right thing to do with her talent is to use others in order to multiply its return (as in parable of the talents). The need to control the yields and see results is the price that proves to be, even when paid, not worth the cost. As the Bible advises, "Let us not become weary in doing what is right, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (New International Version, Galatians 6:10). According to Canavan's (inadequate) reading of Butler's use of the biblical parables in these novels, as well as the biblical parables themselves,

The Parable of the Sower...becomes in Butler's retelling a story about the arbitrariness of God's plan, how the farmer throws the seeds indiscriminately and only few land on the good ground ...[whereas] The Parable of the Talents...seems for Butler to be similarly about the radical unfairness of God's justice, which seems to further reward those to whom much has been given and punish those who have been given little (147).

¹⁴⁵ Importantly for this reading, parable of the sower carries an alternate title, which is parable of the soils. Ground, in the parables, is slippery; it must be tracked through and across sower, talents, and trickster to be located within.

I would more than suggest that the biblical parables are quite a bit more obscure in their meaning than Canavan's interpretation assumes, and even more opaque when put in the context of their re-writing in Butler's narratives (which also necessitates the re-reading of both primary texts). I argue Butler is in fact tackling a multifaceted parabolic intertext while repairing New Wave SF, so that it reads like SF but works like koans or parables. These genres are deceptively simple or direct in their style of delivery, which is a literary technique designed to encode a deeper spiritual and societal, symbolic and semiotic, parabolic and poetic meaning that the readers must decode.

sowing talents

Anyone who prays in space is not there. (Burroughs, 1989: 21)

The servant in parable of the talents has remembered the language from parable of the sower, which is then used in a mixed metaphor of sorts. He knows that "delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful"; yet, if read alongside the other parables, his burying of the talent enacts and mirrors the language of sower, for "what was sown in good soil...yields, in one case, a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty," as well as the language of talents that tells of the other servants who go out and multiply the talents they were given. The burying of the talent is thus a clever way of dramatizing these disparate means that yield different ends, and at the same time, of showing that the servant has not forgotten the words of parable of the sower, which somewhat humorously inform his serious actions (and inactions) in talents. The repetitions as well as the shifting registers, I argue, are meant to bring the reader back to the parable of the sower when reading the parable of the talents in the Bible, and so too are Butler's Parable novels meant to trigger the same sort of self-reflexive reading practice in these texts (and her own). On closer examination, these two parables point toward a re-reading of talents in which the "Lord" that Jesus

describes is in no way equivalent to God. The “Lord” is a wealthy man who has stolen the labor of slaves and the yield of their labor with ‘his’ talents, and in so doing warped the very language of Christ. This radically reframes the ending of the talents parable, in which it is neither God nor Christ admonishing his “wicked and lazy slave,” but a man bearing the title of “Lord” or “Master,” who has done no work to earn his monetary returns and knowingly “reap[s] where [he] did not sow and gather[s] where [he] did not scatter” (NRSV; Matthew 25:28-30). The biblical citation for the commonly used phrase, ‘you reap what you sow,’ reads as follows:

Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life (NIV, Galatians 6:7-9).

The servant cites this passage in the questioning of his Master, which angers him into a response about how investing his money with the bankers would have been preferable due to the interest. This clearly separates this Lord of talents from reading him as a stand-in for God in the parable: his worldly concerns outweigh all others. The detailed account of money-lending practices acts as textual support for this re-reading; a reading of the ‘talents’ in the parable as allegorical does not cohere if applied to the language of the text. How exactly would one invest allegorical talents with bankers so as to return them to God with interest? In the NRSV, the line reads, “You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest” (Matthew 25:26-27). In the AV citation in *Talents*, the same line reads: “Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury” (*Talents* 408). The word ‘usury’ is synonymous with ‘extortion,’ ‘overcharging,’ or ‘loansharking,’ and defined

in the *Oxford Languages Dictionary* (2019) as “the illegal action or practice of lending money at unreasonably high rates of interest.” What’s more, the money-lending practices as designated by the term “usury” are explicitly banned in the Old Testament and the New Testament of the Bible. The easy reading that uses ‘money’ as a metaphor does not track in the parable of the talents; the parable instead seems to be about the way that ‘the word’ has been misappropriated and used for cross-purposes that are not spiritually inclined. So, ‘talents’ in the parable of the talents seems to actually refer to money, whereas the ‘seeds’ in the parable of the sower are nonliteral and refer to the word. This would explain some of the confusion which seems to be the focus of much of the critical scholarship, and account for the ways that the two parables overlap and diverge in the SF narratives proffered by Butler.

At the start of *Talents*, this parable is preached by Olamina’s father, who narrates between the biblical quotations; in this section, which are his own words, he says, “But to the servant who had done nothing with his *silver* talent except bury it in the *ground* to keep it safe, the lord said *harsher* words” (15, emphasis mine).¹⁴⁶ He continues, then, citing from the biblical parable—the AV specifically—but this version of parable of the talents does not use the adjective ‘silver’ in its description of the nature of the talents (at least not in the AV or NRSV).¹⁴⁷ Olamina’s father, a Baptist preacher, has filled in parts of his sermon with his own biblical knowledge, presumably, but Butler has given the reader not only the context of the term talents as used in other parts of the bible (and other versions of the parables); she has also given a clue or hint for our reading and interpretation of the talents parable itself. Olamina’s father explains, “the lord said *harsher* words to this servant,” who did nothing but “bury it in the *ground*,” and while this seems like a good

¹⁴⁶ The “silver talent” recalls Butler’s earliest character, an author-surrogate named “Silver Star” (Canavan 17).

¹⁴⁷ The New International Version (NIV) uses “gold” instead of “talents”; the New Living Translation (NLT) uses “one bag of silver” instead of “one talent,” also referred to as “money.” The AV uses “money” once in the parable.

summary of the talents parable, it uses language which does not appear in the AV, and this is the only version cited directly in the novels (15, emphasis mine). In the AV, the servant says he knew that his Lord was a “*hard* man,” and so he “hid” his “money” in “the *earth*”; while in the NRSV, the slave says that he knew his Master was a “*harsh* man,” and so he “hid” his “talent” in “the *ground*” (Matthew 25:24-25, emphasis mine).¹⁴⁸ In the afterword of *Talents*, Butler also says, “the parable of the talents is one of the *harsher* parables of the Bible, but then, life can be *harsh*” (411, emphasis mine). So, even though the AV is directly cited in the excerpts exclusively, Butler is moving between and across biblical translations, and the NRSV (among others) is cited in the text obliquely again and again in the slightly different but very specific language drawn from the very same passages which are voiced through her characters (and at times herself). To return to the point, Olamina’s father reuses the language of the parable itself from a different version, and like the Master using the words of Jesus from sower in talents, he has unwittingly reversed their directionality. It is the slave who describes his Master as a “harsh man,” which in the sermon is turned back to the Lord’s use of “harsher words” to chide this servant: the words referred to by Olamina’s father are included only in part as “Thou wicked and slothful servant...”, editing out the sections that don’t lend support to the reading he’s done. This leads into the words spoken by (literally) Jesus just after the sower parable, now being spoken by the Lord in the talents parable in the AV: “*For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath*” (Matthew 25:29, emphasis mine). The fact that it is this corrupt Lord who now speaks what Jesus says in another context alters the

¹⁴⁸ In the NRSV, Jesus tells his disciples that his use of parables “fulfill[s] the prophecy of Isaiah that says: ‘You will indeed listen but never understand, and you will indeed look but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are *hard* of hearing, and they have shut their eyes’”; In the NLT, it is “the hearts of these people are *hardened*” (Matthew 13:14-15). The servant’s description of his Lord being “a *hard* man” in the AV likely means he has not understood (or at least has not heeded) the words Christ speaks after the parable of the sower (13:24).

meaning of the words. After telling the parable of the sower, Jesus uses these words—with slight variations in syntax—in answer to a question posed to him by his disciples as to why he himself speaks to the people in the form of parables:

Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. *For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.* Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (NRSV, Matthew 13:11-13, emphasis mine).

To a straightforward question, Jesus responds cryptically, but his language that is stolen in talents (by another speaker that Jesus speaks of but not necessarily as) is used after parable of the sower with reference to “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (in an admittedly rare moment when Jesus is explaining parables to his disciples rather than speaking in parables to the crowds). To drive home the point, this repetition in talents differs from its previous usage because the words are embedded within a parable and spoken by a character, whereas formerly they were used by Jesus to clarify why he himself chooses the genre of parables. The Lord in talents has heard “the word of the kingdom,” but like the crowds, he has not understood them; whereas the servant has heard the word and seems to have a better grasp of it and is struggling to live by it (13:19). The immediate move to read the Lord as all-knowing and the servant as entirely ignorant is at the outset incorrect: both are characters in a parable told by Jesus and each cite the words of Christ to one another within it. In the sower parable, Jesus cites this danger: “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart” (13:19). The danger is to assume the parables have been understood and can be discarded. The risk is an interpretive one, which can also reap rewards: “As for what was sown on good soil, he who hears the word and understands it; he indeed bears fruit, and yields, a hundredfold (13:23).

The “Lord” in talents thus ‘serves’ as an example to contrast with Jesus’ telling of sower in a parabolic test; it is Jesus who “sows the good seed,” but this Lord, who speaks like Jesus and even uses a near equivalent to his words, has not understood what the word is (or what *it* is for). As stated in the NRSV, the Lord is sowing “weeds among the wheat” and “weeds are the sons of the evil one” (13:37, 25, 38). The Lord deceives himself in twisting the words of the prophet to ‘serve’ his profits; in this way, he has bartered shadow for substance. The opening line of talents is instructive, as is its closing line: it starts out with the “Master” (also described as “a man”) distributing his “talents” (also described as “his property”) to his “slaves”: “to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, *to each according to his ability*” (25: 14-15, emphasis mine). Upon further scrutiny, this seems to be the inspiration for the communist proverb, which reads “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” (Karl Marx: 1875). With this biblical citation, Marx levies a strong critique of the parable of the talents specifically, which comports with his weak critique, in my view, of Christianity more generally; however, he seems to have misread the parable while correcting for the very thing that he criticizes with the addition of “to each according to his need.” Christianity has once again been read as synonymous with a sort of capitalism, and while historically this has certainly been true in some sense, the talents parable is a critique of the very same kind with an added literary valence.¹⁴⁹ The last line of talents has this Lord again reappropriate words that Jesus himself says to his disciples in his explanation of the parable of the weeds in the field. In addressing his followers, Jesus says, “the harvest is the end of an age...the reapers are angels,” who “will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin...*throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*”

¹⁴⁹ As George Carlin says, “you know, God loves you—but he needs money!”, which is of course a joke. A bit more critically, the word “capitalism” is somewhat of a misnomer historically speaking, but I use it to designate what in the parable of the trickster is referred to as “dishonest wealth” (NRSV; Luke 16:12).

(NRSV, Matthew 13:39-42, emphasis mine). The ending sentence of parable of the talents repeats these words except for it is not Jesus speaking, but a character in a story which he uses to teach, who says, “*As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (25:30, emphasis mine). The reapers or angels are depicted as gathering out the weeds to burn after the harvest, which is either after one’s death, as in ‘the grim reaper,’ or as Jesus says more broadly, at the end of an age in its entirety. Also, the parable of the weeds among the wheat is a warning against gathering out the weeds which have grown amongst the wheat before the harvest lest the wheat be uprooted in the process (13:24-30). Moreover, the weeds are not thrown into “the outer darkness” as is said in talents but into “the furnace of fire,” which is “where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (25:30; 13:42). These changes of speakers, of genres, of details, of languages, of metaphors, of parables, and of contexts require attention that they have not been given, and so the word has not been received. The parable of the sower and parable of the talents must be read together, as Butler indicates, to unpack them. The word is the seed which can only be received by those who have softened their hearts enough so as to adjust their perception of what is ‘real’ and what is surface, what sounds ‘right’ and what feels wrong. What the “Lord” says in the talents *sounds* wrong; what the “servant” says *feels* right. An analysis of the aesthetic tones proves as much: for the “slave” comes forward, saying, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter,” and admits to his actions, concluding with, “Here you have what is yours”; whereas the Master replies, “You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter?”, concluding with “As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness...” (NRSV, Matthew 25:24-30). The tonal shift can be likened to the Vulgate Bible’s repetition of the Latin phrase, “*Medice, cura te ipsum,*” which when Jesus says it in the AV

means “Physician, heal thyself,” in reference to spiritual ills; however, as many scholars have said, these words are thrown back at Jesus when he is crucified on the cross with the Latin, “alios salvos fecit se ipsum non potest salvum,” translated as “He saved others; himself he cannot save” (Luke 4:23; Matthew 27:42; Isaac Williams: 1844, 384). In *Ethics* (1940-1943), Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks to the challenges of ‘the word’ as both able to be received and to deceive, and to the need for (re)current translation and transformation of its vital form:

In ethics, as in dogmatics, we cannot simply reproduce the terminology of the Bible. The altered problems of ethics demand an altered terminology. But it must be remembered that an extension of the terminology involves the risk of slipping away from what is essential, and also that the use of the biblical terminology is not without its dangers (Bonhoeffer 220).

In “The Third Parable,” Nisi Shawl writes, “At the end of each book there’s an excerpt from the King James Bible giving the New Testament parable for which it was named,” and goes on to speculate that “one of the many obstacles that kept [Butler] from writing the third Parable book” may well have been because “In Christian lore, there is no Parable of the Trickster” (211). However, as Canavan suggests “The Parable of the Unjust Steward (or the “Shrewd Manager”) (Luke 16:1–13)” was likely Butler’s “biblical inspiration for [the] proposed ‘Parable of the Trickster,’ as that is one of its less common alternative names (148). He continues, explaining, “Butler had...hoped to write four Parable sequels,” including,

Parable of the Trickster, Parable of the Teacher, Parable of Chaos, and Parable of Clay. The naming convention derives from another of Olamina’s poems, the one she describes as the first kernel of the religion to come: ‘God is Pliable— / Trickster / Teacher / Chaos / Clay.’ The titles suggest a shift from a Christian idiom (Sower, Talents, and Trickster all reference Biblical parables) to an Earthseed one (Teacher, Chaos, and Clay seem likely to be parables drawn instead from Olamina’s life, not Christ’s).¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ While interesting, Canavan misses the fact that “Trickster” is included in Olamina’s verse used in the sentence prior to prove “Teacher, Chaos, and Clay”—unlike “Sower, Talents, and Trickster”—take on an Earthseed idiom.

What Shawl and Canavan don't connect in their criticism is that trickster is actually a religious and literary crossover which simultaneously invokes African and Christian religious traditions, yet for purposes of imagining the formation of new religious traditions, of which the Earthseed cult is only one example. Butler's novels resurrect the biblical parables within the new literary tradition (SF) to further the evolution of popular genre(s) in the service of changing the cultural commonsense about 'the way things are,' which is the prerequisite for 'thinking' the other ways things have been and could still yet be.¹⁵¹ The parables of Christ are the key that readers can map onto Olamina's life, and thus open out onto the interlocking meaning(s) of Butler's New Wave SF parables. In Jesus and Butler's parables, made explicit in parable of the sower, the seed is the word that must take root in the heart of the readers and listeners; but as Jesus' parables show in their telling, the word is not transparent and can be used to sow good seed or bad seed.¹⁵² Or, as rewritten in an Earthseed verse, "Any Change may bear seeds of benefit, / Seek them out. / Any Change may bear seeds of harm, / Beware" (*Sower* 116). Not unlike the cultural critic Johanna Drucker's theories of modernist painting, which hinges on the "non-transparency of the sign," Butler's cult novels attempt to make the generic mechanism *behind* literature visible to trouble and tempt the process by which inferences about it are made (195).¹⁵³ Jesus also uses parables to expose this non-transparency, which of course implies that there is an invisibility or transparency to language

¹⁵¹ As in rapper Vince Staples lyrics, "Don't tell it like it is, tell it how it could be" ("Like It Is" *Summertime '06*: 2015).

¹⁵² In *Between the Acts* (1941), Virginia Woolf describes the internal creative process which, to me, clarifies Jesus' parable of the sower: "words of one syllable sank down into the mud...The mud became fertile" (212). *The Little Prince* (1943) by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry also reiterates some language of this parable: "There were good seeds from good plants, and bad seeds from bad plants. But seeds are invisible. They sleep deep in the heart of the earth's darkness, until someone among them is seized with the desire to awaken"; "And now here is...a very simple secret: one only sees clearly with the heart, anything essential is invisible to the eyes" (17, 64). In terms of relevant critical scholarship, see Karen Jacobs's *The Eye's Mind* (2004). Or, as Haraway argues in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), this seed must be rooted in "mud more than sky," though "the stars too shine" (11).

¹⁵³ Lil B cites this in music too, "Rap transparent, / my see-through glasses / It's incoherent, and no I'm not staring" ("I'm God," 6 Kiss: 2009).

as naturalized in use which is its most tenacious illusion.¹⁵⁴ As Ferdinand Saussure says, “It is in the nature of language to be overlooked, to be a means and not an end”; or, as in Metzinger’s idiom, “transparency is a special form of darkness” (Saussure qtd. in Beaugrande 194; Metzinger qtd. in Shaviro 44). Reading *Trickster* as a titular homage to the Christian parable and the African trickster has support as a version of the African trickster character appears in her various drafts for the novel; as Canavan notes, the protagonist, Imara, has Doro’s trickster body-swapping powers in some versions, while in others, she’s an undercover journalist who gets converted (which begs the question as to whether Imara is the trickster for going undercover or if Olamina is the trickster for converting the person who wished to expose her as a fraud). Or, as I’ll suggest, the drafts for *Trickster*, in addition to Butler’s stated intentions with regard to the third novel (and its sequels), support a more metafictional reading (in which the real “trickster” in fact refers to Butler herself as the New Wave author-God of the narrative universe). In a surface reading of the biblical parable of the trickster, Canavan says it “shifts the terms away from the hopelessness implied by Butler’s use of the other parables, allowing the diminished party to get one over on the Lord”; though he admits that “the moral ‘lesson’ of this parable can be...hard to understand, even by the standards of the more obscure biblical parables” (148). The crux of the parable, which describes a propertied Master on the brink of firing his “manager” before the manager-turned-trickster erases the debts of the people from whom his wealthy boss was collecting what is his plus usury, is the final lines:

Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much, and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. *If, then, you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?* And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? *No slave can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth* (Luke 16:1-13, emphasis mine).

¹⁵⁴ This idea is reformulated by the rapper Kodak Black with, “Yeah I know you read the text but you ain’t get the message / I speak in codes it ain’t for you if you don’t understand it” (“Unexplainable,” *Project Baby 2*: 2017).

This parable has explanatory value with regard to the other two chosen by Butler because it says in a more forthright manner what has been drawn out across the readings of sower and talents. The introduction of “two masters” clearly indicates that the master of talents is not God but rather one who serves or rather lords over wealth. The Lord or Master in trickster who speaks these lines has decided to keep his manager-turned-trickster on staff because he has shown shrewd judgement in essentially backstabbing his boss. This is what it means to be “faithful” to the organizing principle of “dishonest wealth,” which even though it did not benefit the master in this case, he still sees an earning potential there for his future investments. The second meaning is the one that pivots through the words “true riches,” which in Jesus’ teachings, are not those of the earthly but rather the spiritual world. Thus, the parable of the sower and the parable of the talents cannot be read as if they are simply both allegorical renderings of a spiritual message masked in an earthly metaphor; instead, they must be seen as moving between literal and nonliteral readings of the word put in the mouths of different speakers and stories.

utopia and dystopia

it is less revealing to consider Utopian discourse as a mode of narrative comparable, say, with the novel or epic, than it is to grasp it as an object of mediation analogous to the riddles or koan of the various mystical traditions, or the aporias of classical philosophy, whose function is to provoke a fruitful bewilderment, and to jar the mind into some heightened but unconceptualizable consciousness of its own powers, functions, aims, and structural limits (Jameson, 1977: 39).

In an interview from 1990, before the Parable books were written, Butler states flatly, “I find utopias ridiculous” (Interview with Larry McCaffery and Jim McMenamin 69). Another interview from 2004, after their publication, shows Butler’s stance on utopia has become more ambiguous, referring to the Parable books, she instructs readers: “Now these are not dystopic

books” (“A Conversation with Octavia E. Butler” 172). This reading directive refocuses what we should be looking for when reading these novels (some critics have looked at the sociopolitical extrapolation of the near-future American setting, others at the Earthseed cult’s repositioning of itself within and apart from the conditions imposed by that setting). While I’ll offer a reading reframing critical scholarship on the utopic and dystopic generic elements negotiated within the novels, the comments made by Butler suggest we search for which of the “several ways” within the Parable books is the “only one” that “works” so that we can perceive and apply the lesson(s) in her parables.¹⁵⁵ As Canavan laments, as if Butler’s third novel—*Trickster*—could have somehow answered questions in a way that required no further interpretation, for which the first two novels—*Sower* and *Talents*—were just preamble plotlines before the pure revelation of a ‘true utopia’:

Trickster was supposed to be the moment when we broke orbit. But the novel would never be completed; in fact, it would hardly ever be begun. Without it, *Sower* and *Talents* remain bound in a kind of antinomic relationship: *Sower* (*utopian dreaming*) and *Talents* (*anti-utopian reality*) are locked in a death struggle that cannot be overcome *because the sequel that would have synthesized and moved beyond both* can now never be written (143, emphasis mine).

Expecting a thesis, antithesis, and synthesis as in Hegelian philosophy, Canavan mischaracterizes the work of the novels without even accounting for the established literary criticism on genres he rather weakly (and, incorrectly, in my reading) parenthetically invokes.¹⁵⁶ Moylan, for example,

¹⁵⁵ Butler’s “The Book of Martha” (1997) follows an author-surrogate who literalizes a thought-experiment on the word utopia, etymologically derived from two Greek words: *eutopia*, or ‘good place,’ and *outopia*, or ‘no place.’

¹⁵⁶ It is worth mentioning that the critical division between *Sower* and *Talents* is rather artificial and fails to account for the experimental structure of the novels in which we get virtually all of the information in a non-linear sequence of documents dropped into even the more linear pages of *Sower*. Most of the criticism I’ve surveyed has not cited this fact. Almost all of what is supposedly ‘authentically utopian’ about *Sower* is actually included in the pages of *Talents*, which is considered to be more ‘ambiguously utopian’ (if it’s mentioned at all). The scholarship may have unconsciously reorganized the content of the novels so that *Sower* is everything up until when Acorn falls, and then *Talents* is after that. The Earthseed verses, although heavily cited, are similarly read as if they are wholly outside of

has done considerable work on contemporary American SF writ large (including the Parable novels) from the interdisciplinary fields of utopian and science fiction studies, which emerged from the 1960s and 1970s counterculture(s) along with the wider project of culture studies. In *Demand the Impossible* (1986), Moylan discusses what he calls the “critical utopia,” which isn’t “utopian dreaming,” but its own mode of philosophical discourse (40). In *Scraps the Untainted Sky* (2000), Moylan uses Lyman Tower Sargent’s term, “the critical dystopia,” which isn’t “anti-utopian reality,” and theorizes *Parable of the Sower* as exemplary of that generic formation, not the former (188). In explicating “the critical utopia,” Moylan traces the trajectory of the genre that saw a revival “in the 1960s, at the very time in which utopias appeared to be a literature of the last century” when “a series of new utopian novels emerged from the ferment of opposition and creation in the United States” (*Demand* 40). This ‘cultural transformation’ was a crossover between earlier traditions of Utopian writing and science fiction that stemmed from the social and political counterculture in “a critique of the present...developed in literary form” (41). The critical utopia of the 1960s and 1970s, Moylan explains, “broke beyond the adventure narratives and clichéd stereotypes of the 1920s and 1930s to experiment with more open narrative strategies while retaining the deeply socially critical concerns of the 1950s” (41). This new utopia involved a rejection and revision of traditional utopia in that “utopia is seen as ‘ambiguous’ (Le Guin) or, in a response partly to Le Guin, as ‘ambiguous heterotopia’ (Delany)” (43). Just “as the critical utopias of the 1960s and 1970s revived and transformed utopian writing,” so too “the critical dystopias of the 1980s and 1990s carry out a similar intertextual intervention as they negate the negation of the critical utopian moment and thus make room for another manifestation of the utopian imagination within the dystopian form” (*Scraps* 194-195). Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*,

the novels and/or simply inside the novels and/or as if they are placed randomly throughout, which, of course, like the biblical citations, they are not.

and “to a lesser extent” *Parable of the Talents*, Moylan argues, fits within what Sargent called the “critical dystopia”; however, I complicate this reading in two ways (223). *Sower*, I contend, still retains aspects of the earlier “critical utopia” whereas *Talents* moves decidedly toward the later “critical dystopia”; this follows the imprecise but useful shortcut I’ve already noted across most criticism, in which ‘*Sower*’ includes everything up until Acorn is interned and ‘*Talents*’ refers to everything after that (*Demand* 50). As many other scholars have keenly observed, the Earthseed of *Talents* “has gained power, but only in a compromised form that works in itself and for itself”; as Raymond Williams would say, “it has become an alternative and is no longer an oppositional force” (*Scraps* 243). In the critical utopia, an “off-center” protagonist appears as the “collective hero of social transformation,” and, most crucially, these protagonists are “not dominant, white, heterosexual, chauvinist males, but female, gay, non-white, and generally operating collectively” (*Demand* 44-45). In the Parable books, Lauren Olamina is heterosexual, but she’s also a black woman, and the patchwork community she creates is diverse and inclusive despite of the external pressures against this type of mixed social grouping in the wider social context. The question as to whether Olamina is “dominant” (or simply adamant about her Earthseed beliefs) is a question.

In Moylan’s critical scholarship, which is extensive, there is virtually no mention of the New Wave (even when discussing, for example, Philip K. Dick, John Brunner, and J.G. Ballard): this could be because of Moylan’s singular interest in the sociopolitical efficacy of these literary genres, which pushes him to read them as outward-facing as opposed to the inward-facing New Wave. Moving in two directions, I argue, is the strength of New Wave SF whose inward turn does not preclude or exclude political and social dimension. In fact, according to Burroughs, for any “revolutionary movement” to amount to “more than a change of management,” “a basic change in consciousness must take place”; it is this intensely political orientation his New Wave writing and

psychonautic practices take on at the outset as a secondary if not primary objective (*RBSM* 42).¹⁵⁷ Moylan does not talk about the American New Wave SF as it relates to the 1960s and 1970s counterculture(s), but he does link these same counterculture(s) to his selection of critical utopias, which emerged as subversive and oppositional new genre writing. As he rightly points out, “it is no accident that the major writers of this movement—[Joanna] Russ, [Ursula] Le Guin, [Marge] Piercy, and [Samuel] Delany—began their careers in the so-called ‘subculture’ of science fiction (SF)” (*Demand* 41). So, the 1960s, Moylan says, heralded “a generation of younger writers influenced by *traditional science fiction* as well as by *modern experimental fiction*,” which again seems to describe the New Wave writers as well (some of whom, like Le Guin are included in his list—although the texts cited are “feminist utopias,” and not *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), for example) (41, emphasis mine). He positions this intersection of protest movements, traditional SF, experimental fiction, and identity politics as giving the genre new life as a “symbolic response to the conditions of existence in this century” (41). And to be fair, Moylan’s critical avoidance of the New Wave as politically dubious is similarly cited in Bonhoeffer’s critique of philosophy, insofar as “this abstraction fails to make contact with the specifically ethical problem” (212).¹⁵⁸ Obviously, my re-reading of Butler’s cult novels as an extension and modification of the “utopian impulse” of the American New Wave of SF complicates and challenges Moylan’s classification system while taking up many of his key terms and insights.

As Butler “recognized during her tough 1990s rewrite of *Talents*,” which Canavan says was “at least potentially implicit in her valorization of adaptability and survival,” “weeds... ‘are

¹⁵⁷ In fact, Burroughs speculates, “perhaps Chairman Mao was right and those that control inner space control outer space as well” (*RBSM:ER* 72).

¹⁵⁸ Presumably, this sentiment is what led Bonhoeffer to abandon his theological treatise, *Ethics* (1943-), and return to Nazi Germany, where he was executed in 1945. As he concludes in *Ethics* (1949)—published posthumously—God’s justification of sinners declares us righteous because of and through Christ, and this is “God’s final word” (148).

tough, adaptable, [and] persistent,' too" (qtd. in Canavan 147). Canavan, of course, has not read the parable of the weeds in the field or integrated this observation of Butler's with the parable of the sower. And, true to form, he subsequently writes off Butler's entire project with what is in his view, as informed by the notes and drafts of *Trickster*, a "deflated reversal" (147). He concludes,

In short, we discover that achieving Earthseed's Destiny, despite Lauren Olamina's dreams, hasn't solved the problem of history or the human at all, only extend our confrontation with the very difficult problems that drove its development in the first place...The Destiny was essentially a hyperbolic delaying tactic, a strategy of avoidance; even achieved, it's worthless in its own terms" (150).

I suggest that this is a misreading in the extreme, and what it actually shows is that the word is a seed that can yield wheat or weeds, which is also the lesson of the biblical parables. The tree of knowledge is fruit of the poisonous tree, which begot the word, but as Derrida says in "Plato's Pharmakon," "the poison is the cure" (3). The Destiny, like the parables, is not "worthless in its own terms," if we only were to attend to the terms themselves.¹⁵⁹ As I've argued, Canavan hasn't considered (or has confused) two (or more) aspects: first, that the destiny of Earthseed is likely nonliteral as in the titular parables from the Bible; second, that Earthseed's Destiny was never meant to solve the problem of "the human" or "human history" within the confines of the novels, but Butler's books are indeed meant to at least help us begin to do so in the real world. *Trickster* does not undo *Sower* or *Talents*—it reframes them at the most fundamental and profound levels and necessitates not a dismissal but a serious re-reading to discern Butler's enterprise, which is categorically different from Olamina's. In New Wave SF, especially Philip K. Dick, the plot twist or surprise ending is not intended to undo the work of what came before it in the text, but rather to

¹⁵⁹ The religious and literary aspects of Butler's Parable books are more salient than the scientific and political ones; the former is the path to the latter, not the reverse. How could we decolonize inner space by colonizing outer space?

trigger the re-reading of the entire text(s) in light of what has unexpectedly followed. This is a philosophical and interpretive injunction, which is not without its fun, and yet retains the serious nature of fiction—like Dick’s and Butler’s—translated into SF’s popular form. What Canavan misses is both the humor of the *Tricker* plot twist, itself a definitive feature of the American New Wave, as well as the interpretive frame it retroactively imposes on the previous two novels. So, anticipating my argument somewhat, the surprise ending of *Trickster* is essentially contrary to our expectations for the Earthseed colonists: “Some are terrified; many are bored; nearly all are deeply unhappy” (Canavan 144). Butler’s notes “frame this in biological terms: ‘phantom-limb pain...[from] a somehow neurologically incomplete amputation’” (Butler qtd. in Canavan 144). Another says, ““Think of problems with the new world as graft-versus-host disease—a mutual attempt at rejection’” (ibid.). The novel would “begin happily, in a seeming utopia, fooling the reader not to expect the coming ‘long, terrible slide’ into disaster” (ibid.). As Canavan explains,

There are pages and pages of wonderful world-building background writing about the way their colony is laid out architecturally, the jobs they do and how often they rotate, how they elect leaders, how they solve conflicts, what they eat . . . [Butler] returned over and over again to world-building aspects of the narrative—the social organization of the colony, the physics governing Bow, the possible organisms that might live in such a place, Earth-historical parallels to their situation (145).¹⁶⁰

This quite obviously harkens back to the earlier tradition of utopic writing, which is among other things, intensely expository in its detailed layout of an alternate sociohistorical (or sociopolitical) schema.¹⁶¹ This exhaustive (and exhausting) mode of world-building is utopian writing’s defining

¹⁶⁰ The term “world-building” derives from early 19th century scientific papers outlining mathematical parameters of hypothetical worlds and different physical laws which might govern their structure. A 1965 essay by R.A. Lupoff introduced the concept to literary criticism on science fiction and fantasy.

¹⁶¹ In *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), Zygmunt Bauman cites “the design of the perfect society” as one of the features of classical utopias, which in his work has very negative implications (91). Auschwitz exemplifies exactly what “the rationalizing, designing, controlling dreams and efforts of modern civilization are able to accomplish if not mitigated, curbed, or counteracted” (93).

feature, which is so categorically cognitive as to be unequivocally estranging for modern readers (in the negative sense of both words).¹⁶² The false start that Butler planned for *Trickster*, which is meant to ‘trick’ readers into thinking they are in one genre (utopia) before plunging them into the next (anti-utopia) is both sincere and satirical. To me, this reads as not only sad for the colonists, but also hilarious; more critically, it reproduces a signature move of American New Wave SF; this lends support to my re-reading of Butler’s Parable books, and Earthseed’s verses, as part of the continued legacy of the earlier 1960s and 1970s generic formation, which is not to say its throughlines with SF of the 1980s and 1990s don’t continue to hold.¹⁶³

From this vantage, it is possible to recategorize the respective subgeneric transformations in the arc of the would-be trilogy of *Sower*, *Talents*, and *Trickster*. *Sower*, I suggest, we ought to read as a “critical utopia”; *Talents*, I propose, we might more precisely term a “critical dystopia”; whereas *Trickster*, I claim, we might classify as an “anti-utopia.” In *Sower*, Earthseed’s direction is open, Acorn’s community is literal, and Lauren’s actions are oppositional even if somewhat insular; I argue that this makes the Earthseed of Acorn and *Sower* tentatively fit into the “critical utopia” category (*Demand* 44). While in his critique of *Sower*, Phillips argues, “a utopianism that has shrunk to the dimensions of survivalism is perhaps part of the problem rather than its solution,” this is far less true of Earthseed in Acorn than it is of Earthseed in *Talents*, which he applauds (308). Acorn is almost ready to extend its “survivalism” when their seedling community is destroyed. As Moylan also notes, prior to the change in overall strategy, which we don’t hear of

¹⁶² Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888) and William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890) are two prominent historical examples of the utopian tradition. Nisi Shawl’s *Everfair* (2016) is a more contemporary, and in my view, interesting example; the alternate history sf novel focuses on a fiction utopian cult—based on a real socialist group, the Fabian Society—set in the Congo in the late 19th Century. (It also seems like a nod to Butler’s Parable books).

¹⁶³ As Moylan says of Dick’s 1960s and 1970s writing: “However accurate in its mapping of U.S. society, Dick’s dystopian sf, like Orwell’s, often ends in a pessimistic rush. Yet the almost (and occasionally actual) self-reflexive quality of his work (as it navigates between a sober realism and an acerbic humor) pulls it at the very last moment from the anti-utopian flames and places it somewhere in the contested zone *between* Utopia and Anti-Utopia, taking it to the uneasy but creative position that Dick seemed to prefer in his work and his life” (*Scraps* 174).

until halfway into *Talents*, Acorn's Earthseed is "on the verge of launching" itself beyond the commune structure: they are "spreading the word of the Earthseed message by voluntary missionaries...and preparing to establish new 'clones of Acorn' after the first community reaches a maximum population of 1,000" (*Scraps* 240). So, although "Acorn is best viewed as a kind of left-wing communitarian survivalism," this is not because "the absence of a social revolutionary force in the imagined American future makes a politics of survival the only means of averting the coming catastrophe" (Phillips 308). Lauren's plans for Earthseed still have revolutionary potentials for the survival of the wider world, even in the humble beginnings of the Acorn commune. Like the "critical utopias" of the 1960s and 1970s that Moylan describes, "Acorn...embraces diversity, in terms of race, class, and sexual identity: its members are black, white, Asian, and Latino, rich and poor, gay and straight" (*Demand* 44; Phillips 308). Moreover, other aspects of Acorn are also reminiscent of the utopian tradition, which is what critical utopias attempt to revive in a new more precarious social context. The Acorn compound is on a "pastoral locale," which is located "in area that has been amenable to isolated and independent living since the previous century, when marijuana growers, whisky distillers, poets, and others disinterested in the intrusion of official surveillance lived and thrived in the remote hills" (*Scraps* 236). Acorn members live off the land in a way which is "more like gardening than farming," and while this style of living requires hard physical labor, and isn't exactly the "northern edens" mentioned earlier in the novel, they have managed to maintain their freedom through a form of collaborative codependence, and they have not had to become "some kind of twenty-first century slave[s]" (*Sower* 321, 190, 151). As Phillips notes, "Acorn's distinct agrarian character...would seem to make it an anti-modern undertaking, not unlike a type of the utopian commune that sprang up in the nineteenth century as part of the revolt against industrialism" (308). Through these concrete actions subtended by their new belief

system, the Earthseed cult of *Sower* as realized in Acorn has fulfilled the conditions of Moylan's "critical utopias," which "keep the utopian impulse alive by challenging it and deconstructing it within its very pages" (*Demand* 45). Despite its untimely demise, the Earthseed of Acorn has deep roots, and represents "a harvest of survivors"; as Lauren says, "It's a world gone to hell...we've only got each other to keep it off us" (*Sower* 295, 286).¹⁶⁴

In *Talents*, the Destiny has been determined, Earthseed's community is nonliteral, and Olamina's actions are no longer truly oppositional, even if they seem more widely dispersed; I argue that this makes the Earthseed of *Talents* fit into the "critical dystopia" category (*Scraps* 188). Whereas the "enclave of Acorn had been based on production" and "Earthseed adherents bartered goods and services in the local economy"; in *Talents*, "Olamina shifts the program to a parasitic model, seeking out the beneficiaries of social destruction to discipline the fruits of that production into that which might benefit the Destiny" (Morris 282). After Acorn's annihilation, Olamina's earlier openness toward Earthseed's developmental speed, direction, and movement resigns itself to a kind of closure. Moylan considers Olamina's veritable fixation on "the Destiny in *Talents*" to be a loss of what was "the historically rooted contestation and local activism found in *Sower*"; whereas "Phillip Wenger argues the reverse," seeing "The Earthseed project...[as] the figure for a truly radical totalizing project" (qtd. in Morris 271). Morris agrees with both of these theorists, positioning Olamina's strategy as a necessary evil which accomplishes its stated objectives within

¹⁶⁴ Some of the difficulty in discussing the *Sower*/*Talents* split is actually cited by Moylan as characteristic of the "critical utopia" because "the form of the utopia itself is altered at the level of the self-reflexivity of the texts": "The apparently unified, illusionary, and representational text of the more traditional utopia is broken open and presented in a manner which is, first of all, much more fragmented—narratives intertwining present and future or past and present, single protagonists being divided into multiples, or into male and female versions of the same character. Secondly, the critical utopian text includes much more commentary on the operations of the text itself, from the subtle connection of temporal theory with the chapter structure in *The Dispossessed*, to the narrative ambiguity linked with the vagaries of time and causation in *Women on the Edge of Time*, to the interpolations of an authorial voice and exhortations on the subversive work of the book in *The Female Man*, to the self-reflexive appendices on the modular calculus in *Triton*" (*Demand the Impossible* 45). Butler's Parable duology has nearly all of these traits.

the strictures of the social and economic setting: “Olamina re-creates Earthseed as a parasitic movement, one that draws off of but does not visibly participate in the very capital networks that...made Earthseed necessary” (282). In *Sower*, Lauren says, “I’ll use these verses to pry people loose from the rotting past, and maybe push them into saving themselves and building a future that makes sense” (79). In *Talents*, Olamina’s verses have taken a backseat to more literally minded means of achieving the Destiny; she has given up on everyone in the world who is down to leave Earth. The only way to “pry people loose” is the Earthseed rocket, and the “rotting past” has been equated with the present world. Even with a literalized vehicle of transcendence, there is a “relative absence of transcendence language at the end of *Talents*” (Morris 284). While this “recognizes the impossibility of twentieth-century-style social movement organization in the absence of a robust public sphere,” it also ignores the social achievements and structural layout modeled in Acorn and bottom-up plan to make virtual “clones of Acorn” to spread slowly across the country (Morris 281; *Talents* 156). It begs the question as to whether Olamina’s vision for space colonization is really “a future that makes sense,” or if the “prophetic perspective and postmodernity [that] seem to cut in different directions” have been sliced from one another by the end of *Talents* (Phillips 301). As the Taoists say, “you can’t push the river” (Le Guin Interview). Or, as written in Verse 64 of the *Tao Te Ching*: “Act of things and you will ruin them. Grasp for things and you will lose them. Forcing a project to completion, you ruin what was almost ripe” (qtd. in Kohn 21). A contradiction gnaws at the root of Olamina’s thinking at its heart it is in the language of evolution. Olamina says:

I must build...not a physical community this time...I understand at last how easy it is to destroy such a community...I must create not only a dedicated little group of followers, not only a collection of communities as I once imagined, but a movement. *I must create a new fashion in faith—a fashion that can evolve into a new religion...*[one] that can help humanity to put its energy, competitiveness, and creativity *to work doing the truly vast job of fulfilling the Destiny* (*Talents* 257, emphasis mine).

While Olamina is clearly talking in terms of cultural evolution, which is the religious project of Earthseed; she is, at the same time, immediately sliding into biological evolution, which is the scientific scheme of the Destiny. In *Sower*, Earthseed was already a new, evolving religion, but here Earthseed is downgraded to being “a new fashion in faith.” In order to take a leap forward in the Destiny, Olamina has actually walked Earthseed back. Biological evolution, where “our [new] worlds will remake us as we remake them,” has been prioritized as the one and only way to secure cultural evolution, at least for Olamina, instead of what was formerly the reverse (322). The Destiny now appears as a shortcut, or a way for Olamina to fast-track her earlier objectives; the Destiny in *Talents* becomes “a new possibility for humanity in a species-wide, transhistorical sense: a universalizing project that seeks evolution as salvation” (Morris 279). As Olamina says, “We can be a long-term success and the parents, ourselves, of a vast array of new peoples, new species...or we can be just one more abortion” (*Talents* 48). Yet, one wonders if the launch of the Earthseed rocket represents the “abortion” rather than the rebirth of Olamina’s religion. Looking back at the origins of the Earthseed moniker, there is evidence that supports this reading. Lauren records this moment, saying,

Well, today, I found the name, found it while I was weeding the back garden and thinking about the way plants seed themselves, windborne, animalborne, waterborne, far from their parent plants. *They have no ability at all to travel great distances under their own power; and yet, they do travel...Earthseed. I am Earthseed...* Someday, I think there will be a lot of us. And I think we’ll have to seed ourselves farther and farther from this dying place (*Sower* 76, emphasis mine).

Although this idea of Earth as a “dying place” will come to dominate Olamina’s ideology (and is repeated throughout the novels in keeping with its apocalyptic timbre), Lauren’s discovery of the Earthseed name likens words to seeds which can yield “wheat” or “weeds.” Like “plants [which] seed themselves,” ideas “have no ability to travel great distances under their own power, and yet,

they do travel”; Olamina’s anxieties and fears cause her to reassert a terrible kind of self-control, in which she capitalizes on her “ability” (or “talents”). Olamina’s desire for Earthseed “to travel great distances under [her] own power” is a different power than she wielded previously, which is more akin to Jesus’ parable of the talents than parable of the sower, and is not what is referred to above. Canavan observes, “in this sense Earthseed doesn’t just reconcile science fiction and religion; it remakes science fiction as religion” (128). This is essentially what Olamina does by focusing on literal fulfillment of the Destiny in *Talents*, but I argue that this is a critique within the Parable books rather than an endorsement. The metacommentary given through the biblical parables seems to suggest a sense in which modern Christianity hasn’t just reconciled capitalism and religion; it has remade capitalism as religion. This is the reading of parable of the sower and parable of the talents that also accounts for a reading of parable of the trickster and makes sense of their content and contradictions, as well as of their place in Butler’s published duology and in the intended arc of the trilogy.

In *Trickster*, the self-sustaining commune turned parasitical cult has turned space colony; as previously argued, the notes and drafts of *Trickster* fit into the “anti-utopia” category (*Scraps* 194). Although it is masked with some of the accouterments of utopic writing, which should not be wholly discounted, the various plotlines of the unpublished *Trickster* included the following: in one draft, “the colonists are in total denial about the fact that they are all slowly going blind”; in a different version, “the blindness is sudden, striking randomly and irreversibly”; and almost all of them show how the colonists “begin to go insane, or suffer seizures, or mad rages, or fall into long comas (Canavan 144). In my personal favorite, the Earthseed colonists appear to have “encounter[ed] intelligent aliens who might be real yet might just be tokens of their escalating collective madness; and on and on and on” (145). These scenarios all show that in attempting to

escape the madness and folly of Earth, Olamina has unwittingly launched the Earthseed settlers into a new type of interstellar psychosis and severance. Butler's drafts and notes for *Parable of the Trickster* all have extreme importance for understanding both the form and the content of the previous two novels. Her notes more than strongly suggest that leaving the Earth was a mistake, one which has all sorts of unforeseen, at times humorous, consequences for the unsuspecting, ill-prepared colonists. This radically alters how the Earthseed verses and the Bible's parables work in the duology and would-be trilogy. It indicates how critics and readers alike have misread the 'literalness' of the novels, and which forces a return to find out what may have gone wrong with Olamina from *Sower* to *Talents*. Weheliye talks about "physiological and metaphysical hunger," which I locate in the word '*starving*,' and this physical and metaphysical hunger for the stars is the human need that religion and SF each respond to, and that Butler articulates together in her New Wave SF parables (93). As Butler tells Mehaffy and Keating in 1997, before *Talents* was published in 1998, she meant "the introduction of other characters as point-of-view narrators... to show 'Olamina doesn't have the only truth'"; Butler then explains, providing us with insight to guide our interpretations of the duology, as well as clarifying her notes on their sequel,

If we humans are, *as Lauren believes, and as I believe*, a part of Earth in significant ways, then perhaps we can't, or shouldn't, leave and go to another world. The system of Earth is self-regulating, but not for any particular species, in the same way that the human body has its own metabolic logic. *Perhaps the Acorn community* represents the most logical way to halt the damage we're doing to the Earth and to ourselves as humans (Butler qtd. in Canavan 136, emphasis mine).

Here, Butler seems to give an answer to the question posed earlier as to which of the ways that is given in the novel is the one way that actually works. As Larkin says of Olamina in the first two pages of *Talents*, she was "so focused, and yet so misguided" with what is ominously described as her "damned Earthseed" (2-3). And, as Larkin adds to Butler's afterword on Olamina's middle

name, “Oya,” who was a “Nigerian Orisha—goddess—of the Yoruba people,” she was not only a “goddess of the Niger River...she was also goddess of the wind, fire, and death” (48).

On her sixteenth birthday in 2025, Lauren writes: “Here’s the birthday gift that came into my mind this morning *as I woke up*—just two lines”: ‘The Destiny of Earthseed / Is to take root among the stars’” (*Sower* 84, emphasis mine). She continues, saying,

This is what I was reaching for a few days ago when the story of the new planets being discovered caught my attention. *It’s true, of course. It’s obvious.* Right now, it’s also impossible. *The world is in horrible shape...* And yet, ‘The Destiny of Earthseed, / Is to take root among the stars’ (85).

She then says, “*I don’t know how it will happen or when it will happen.* There’s so much to do before it can even begin. I guess that’s to be expected. There’s always a lot to do before you get to go to heaven” (*Sower* 85, emphasis mine). What is important to note about these early journal entries is that the destiny of Earthseed comes to Lauren “as [she] woke up,” which connects back the New Wave, inner space, and the earlier dream sequences. Additionally, Lauren comments on her own verse by saying, “it’s obvious,” which in the context of the parable genre that frames the novels couldn’t be less true. And Lauren has said that the world is in “horrible shape,” which if read with other Earthseed verses on shaping, suggests our place is here. And finally, Lauren says what Olamina will disallow, which is that she does not “know how it will happen or when it will happen,” resisting the closure that Olamina ends up enacting. Later, in a more developed verse, it reads: “The Destiny of / Earthseed is to take root among the stars, and / there, again, to grow, *to learn, and to fly*” (*Talents* 325, emphasis mine). Once again, calling back the opening dream in *Sower* in which Lauren is learning—dream-lesson by dream-lesson—to fly, is an indication that like the biblical parables, the destiny is nonliteral, and refers rather to the religious realm of inner space. The flying dream ends with failure, and the light Lauren seeks and sees in the doorway is

not the one she finds when fire consumes what was her dream.¹⁶⁵ In yet another Earthseed verse, Olamina says, “Purpose / Unifies Us: / It focuses our dreams, / Guides our plans, / Strengthens our efforts. / Purpose / Defines us, / Shapes us, / And offers us / Greatness” (137).¹⁶⁶ One wonders if it is actually purpose that has focused Olamina’s dreams, or if Olamina’s dreams have instead been driving against not at Earthseed’s purpose. The end of the duology cuts to Olamina, now an eighty-one-year-old woman, watching the Earthseed colonists leave the Earth for “other worlds” which she won’t live to see (405). In her last journal entry from 2090, written fifty-five years after the penultimate one from 2035, Olamina twice repeats the phrase, “I know what I’ve done” (405, 407). She also says in the 2035 entry, “I’ve always known that sharing Earthseed was my only true purpose” (393).¹⁶⁷ The fifty-five-year gap from the final two journal entries from 2035 to 2090 replicate the numerical connections between the recurring dream and nightmare that opens *Sower* and *Talents*, respectively: the first dream recounted in *Sower* is the night before her fifteenth and her father’s fifty-fifth birthday, and the second nightmare recounted in *Talents* is the night before the fifth anniversary of Acorn, or Arrival Day, and is a replay of “that night five years ago” when her hometown was burned (*Talents* 15). When Lauren is journeying north after this tragedy and gets together with Bankole, she is eighteen years old, whereas in Olamina’s final journal entry, she is eighty-one years old. Earthseed is “being born,” in Lauren’s words, when she is eighteen, and

¹⁶⁵ Jerry Phillips describes the Parable books as SF that “explores latent and manifest tendencies (with regard to both utopia and dystopia)” (300). “Latent” and “manifest” are terms used in Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), which shows the relationship between these seemingly disparate realms.

¹⁶⁶ It is worth pausing again to notice the repetition of Larkin’s comments on her mother being “so focused, and yet so misguided” in context of the verse: “purpose” is what “focuses” our “dreams” and “guides our plans” (*Talents* 2, 137).

¹⁶⁷ The full quotation is “Whatever happens, as long as I’m alive, I won’t stop working, preaching, aiming people toward the Destiny. I’ve always known that sharing Earthseed was my only true purpose” (393). This will create a contrast with her last entry that reads “if you want something...unless you die, you will have it”; it also shows how Olamina has changed since Acorn, when she critiqued her brother Marc for saying, “I’m not out to teach a class. I want to preach a sermon” (405, 149). In her last entry, Larkin says, “[Olamina] kept her word. She never stopped teaching...speaking, training, guiding, writing,” but Earthseed’s verses (and Acorn specifically) were explicit with regard to a pedagogy of “giving, taking, learning, teaching” in “mutual symbiosis” (404, 135).

Olamina dies, as Larkin says, when she is eighty-one (*Sower* 220). The last entry of *Talents* talks about futures “on other worlds we haven’t yet dream of,” and the opening page of *Talents*, which is Bankole’s one and only Earthseed verse, is entitled “From Memories of Other Worlds” (*Talents* 405, 7). The Earthseed epigraph from the first page of *Sower* twice uses the phrase “positive obsession,” just as “I know what I’ve done” begins and ends the last entry of *Talents*. This cyclical, parabolic structure of the duology with specific repetitions and inversions signals the importance of the dream content and the literary form, which thus warrants further consideration as an interpretive lens. Olamina writes of “the Earth’s first starship,” “This is my life flying away... This is my immortality. I have the right to see it, hear the thunder of it, smell it” (406). The closing lines of *Talents* repeats the language of the nightmare’s ending that begins the novel, in which Olamina says: “I hear thunder. I see the streak of light rise higher in the sky, grow brighter” right before she falls (16). Like the reversal from *Sower* to *Talents*, when a dream of flying turns into a nightmare of falling, Olamina describes her life as flying away right before falling to her death. The “light streak” of the *Sower* dream is that “of a meteor flashing westward across the sky,” which turns into “a streak of light” in the *Talents* nightmare, “rising into the sky like some life force escaping” (5; 15). In the last journal entry, Olamina says, obliquely referring to Earthseed as her positive obsession, “It has you. There is no escape. What a cruel and terrible thing escape would be if escape were possible” (*Talents* 405). In yet another spatial reorientation, the meteor shooting across the sky is a falling star, while the light flying upward is inexplicable, at least until its literalization in the space launch. The first Arrival to Acorn has become the “first Departure” of Earthseed and this reading seems to indicate that the life force escaping may be the real substance of “a sweet and powerful / Positive obsession” as represented in Lauren’s verses, which Olamina tragically and ironically reverses in her closing prose commentary (406, 346).

The excerpt from the AV's parable of talents immediately follows Olamina's last entry, ending with the line: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath" (408). While Olamina has used her political talents to multiply her monetary "talents" for the destiny of Earthseed, as the "Lord" in the parable of the talents does, she says earlier on that her real talent *is* Earthseed. In her last entry, she writes: "If you want a thing—truly want it, want it so badly that you need it...then unless you die, you will have it" (405). But the talents excerpt above, especially if read with its pairing from sower, refers to what one will receive from God after the harvest, which is in death. The spiritual world is the substance, while the earthly world is the shadow. In teaching with these parables that Butler selects, Jesus illustrates the confusion between and conflation of spiritual and earthly wealth. The name Olamina, as mentioned earlier, means 'this is my wealth,' which again, locates the real weight of meaning in the word. Olamina remarks, "Earthseed was always *true*. I've made it *real*, given it *substance*" (405, emphasis mine). And, in registering her objections to the starship's name, the *Christopher Columbus*, she says, "This ship is not about a shortcut to riches...*The name is nothing*" (405, emphasis mine). In my reading of the parable of the talents, it *is* about a shortcut to riches while also emphasizing that the Master will eventually reap what he has sown in the real but spiritual sense. The names of the parables, their invocation in the titles, and the name of Earthseed, is *everything*. The word is the seed, not the settlers. And the sad implication is that Olamina, like the Master, has really bartered shadow for substance. In the Bible, it says, "*For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?*" (AV, Ecclesiastes 6:12, emphasis mine). Suggesting, I argue, in keeping with Butler's notes on and drafts for *Trickster*, that Olamina could not possibly and truly does not "know what [she's] done" (*Talents* 405, 407). She says, "This is my immortality. I have the right

to see it,” but one cannot see what lies ahead, one has to act on faith, “For who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?” (*Talents* 406; AV, Ecclesiastes 6:12). Olamina has lost her true faith in the *preaching* of Earthseed whose power is in sowing the word not on other planets, but in the heart of oneself and others; for “He has also set eternity into the human heart” (AV, Ecclesiastes 3:11). As Benjamin counsels, “Action is a means of dreaming. Reflection is a means of staying awake” (“On Hashish” 117). Olamina’s traumatic experiences hardened her heart, and in Larkin’s retelling of when she learns Marc has withheld information about Larkin’s whereabouts, Olamina unknowingly resounds the Master’s language from the talents parable: “I never thought he would do that to me. I never thought he hated me enough to do a thing like that. I never thought he could hate anyone that much. I saved him from *slavery*! I saved his *worthless* life, goddamnit!” (*Talents* 402-403, emphasis mine). Omitted from what is cited from the parable of the talents at the novel’s close, the line immediately following the last line of the excerpt reads: “Now take this *worthless slave* and throw him into the outer darkness” (NRSV, Matthew 25: 30, emphasis mine). Olamina’s last journal entry says, “How completely, how thoroughly he has stolen my child. I have never even tried to forgive him” (*Talents* 407). Directly contradicting the Earthseed verse that reads, “Be true to the Destiny. / Forgive your enemies, / Forgive yourself,” Olamina has not and will not let herself heal from the pain she’s been forced to endure (141). As it says in another of Earthseed’s verses, “To survive, / Know the past. / Let it touch you, / Then let / The past / Go” (337).

I have destroyed that architecture by dream in which learning is a journey. Chance and desire form the voyage. Here's the dream's map.

I bought a map, which was so huge that the winds tore it to pieces.

I consulted the map again. I had even less idea what I was seeing. This map was the only key to the door that said OUT.

(Acker, *My Mother: Demonology*, 1993: 193, 231,235).

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